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A READY-MADE FAMILY;

OR,

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF

JULIAN LEEP'S CHERUB.

A Story in Three Volumes.

VOL. II.

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A READY-MADE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

PASSION.

On another of those very numerous occasions when Mr. Guffey desired solitude for the purpose of collecting his thoughts, Harry was dismissed to the open air, and went, for the sixth time, to the Dulwich Gallery. It must not be supposed that he went there from love of the pictures; he was prompted by a more potent motive. But being of a practical disposition and eminently clear-headed,—save when possessed by passion (whether the result of anger or love, of ambition or those fears which are half-brothers to despair),—he thought to him-

self that he must have a subordinate object, which should occupy him in the event of his first and all-important object not being accomplished. Accordingly, as he had become acquainted, in the course of his travels through Julian Leep's book-shelves, with the names of the most distinguished painters, and, theoretically, with their peculiarities also, he endeavoured to find out, from the few examples in the gallery, in what respect these pictures excelled; he was obliged to confess, however, after a very severe scrutiny, that, although he knew what pictures he ought to count excellent and which not, he could not account for the high esteem in which the dingiest among them were held. But he supposed that if he had been able to raise the veil with which time had shrouded them, he would have discerned divers well-rounded forms standing out distinct from the background to some appreciable extent. As it was, he was bound to confess that he could not enjoy what he inspected; yet he continued parading the gallery and studying the pictures, from all manner of

points and distances, more earnestly and more laboriously than any other visitor. Indeed, so long did he stay in the place, out-tiring all others, that the attendant marked him as something unusual, and if not dangerous, still interesting as a relief to monotony.

But the attendant's faint suspicion that the long-enduring visitor designed evil was strengthened when he found that the suspected one cast many furtive glances towards him as he stood at his post by the door; so he hid himself, in the belief that he should entrap Harry in wrong-doing.

Harry, however, still continued examining the pictures without malice, and with every demonstration of interest, now shading his eyes, now walking backwards, and now ducking down, but always keeping a good watch upon the door.

The misanthropic spirit of the official upon this gave way, and the spirit of the man—which was charitable, jovial, and eminently friendly towards his species—took possession of him and urged him to lay the matter before

a companion attendant, who, after taking an observation of Harry, explained the whole matter to his fellow as if he had been in Harry's full confidence: "That young gent.'s been here before *with* a young lady."

"Ah!" said the other, thoughtfully regarding Harry, as if imagining all the hopes and fears that Harry had been and was still a prey to.

"And," said the second attendant, who seemed to be equally as genial and well disposed towards his fellow-creatures as attendant number one, "what's very singular, that young lady's gone by just a minute ago, and I'm afraid they'll miss each other."

At this, both shook their heads and looked very gravely at Harry still, to all appearances, enjoying the pictures.

Presently the man who had interpreted the mystery wondered "Whether it would do to go and tell the gent. He'd like it," he added, with a smile.

"Yes, he'd like it," said the first man, "go and tell him."

With this the well-informed attendant has-

tened to Harry and said, "The party you're waiting for has gone by not five minutes ago, sir."

Harry was not so much struck with the singularity of the occurrence and the power of divination which the well-informed attendant exhibited, as with the importance of the information imparted. Accordingly he thanked the man very heartily for his kindness, and set off at full speed immediately he had learnt in which direction to go.

"He's glad, eh?" asked the first attendant.

"Uncommon," said the other, "and coloured up like a gal."

Hereupon the men seemed to be glad also, but after a while fell to talking of other things.

In the meantime, Harry found the man's words true, and—forgetful of everything in the world beside the pleasure he anticipated from his meeting with Lucy and the special pleasure of recounting the incident which had prefaced their meeting—he bounded full speed and breathless to Lucy's side, so startling her

that she almost cried out. Nor did his abundant, though awkward apologies chase away the appearance of distress which she wore.

Harry was afraid that the suddenness and unmannerly nature of his approach had shocked her, and, angrily charging himself with thoughtlessness, he asked what he could do to make amends.

"Nothing," said Lucy; "nothing."

But Harry saw distress in her face still, and asked, "Why, then, do you look as if you were afraid of me? You surely know me."

"Oh, yes, I know you; but—but, Harry, I've been home," she said in a voice that was full of meaning.

And Harry, catching at the words, repeated them passionately, "You've been home; and has *home* distressed you?"

"Oh, why do you speak so, Harry?" pleaded Lucy.

And Harry, instantly penitent, answered, "Because I'm hasty and passionate, and don't think."

"It's not my fault, you know," said Lucy, following out her own thoughts.

"No, no," said Harry, drawing her hand through his arm. "Whatever it is, it's not your fault, so let's be calm while you tell me what it is that's not your fault, and what it is that's distressed you."

Then as they walked, Lucy said, "Aunt told papa that Mr. Guffey and you were here, and he seemed pleased to hear that you had found a friend in Mr. Guffey; but, questioning me alone, he found that you and I had met, and I told him we were good friends."

"Yes," Harry broke in; "what then?"

He said this so sharply and with such evidence of bitter feeling that Lucy said, "Oh, Harry, you must not speak so; you make me afraid of you."

Then Harry, as quick to be penitent as he was ready to give way, prayed Lucy would forgive him, which of course she did, and then she continued her narrative as they sat on a low bank in a bye-path of the wood.

"Papa looked very gravely at me when I said we were good friends. I was sitting on a stool beside him, and, Harry, he put his hand

upon my head and said, 'Now, Lucy, tell me very truly are you more than good friends?' and oh, Harry, I deceived him, for looking in his face I asked, as if surprised, 'What more could we be, papa?'" Then Lucy fell to crying as she said, "For, Harry, we *are* more than very good friends, and I deceived papa."

Lucy's tears reminded Harry that he was in nowise sorry for the deception which she had practised and for which she grieved. Such was the intensity of his anger that it overshadowed even his love. Presently, however, he dried her tears, and she looked up with her half-blinded eyes so prettily that Harry smiled back to her, and this in her simplicity she felt repaid her for the pain which brought the tears.

But with the end of this pretty dalliance Lucy was reminded that her story was unended, so suddenly becoming grave she put Harry's arms from round about her, saying, "Why, Harry, this is like awakening from a happy dream."

"Then why not dream on?" was Harry's

prompt rejoinder, but Lucy shook her head and said, "No, I must not; I should not have given way so even for that little time."

"Why not?" asked Harry, inwardly encouraging rebellion.

"Because," said Lucy faltering, "when I deceived papa he said it was not his wish that you and I should become more than good friends; and as we were in danger of becoming so, he asked me whether I would refrain from seeing you, and whether I could promise him not to permit myself to be alone with you."

"And you consented?" Harry cried.

"What else could I do? I had told him we were careless of each other," said Lucy, again very near tears, and Harry was silent. In his thoughts at this time he seemed to count Lucy's twinges of conscience of very little moment, save that they caused her pain; and he did not feel that even that was a matter for very serious distress, seeing that the pain would not long endure. Already he had learnt that love was far more potent than duty. Love he was sure would more speedily conjure them

to receive happiness than duty could force them to parting and regrets.

So without counting father's or mother's claims and Lucy's strong desire to respond to those claims, Harry essayed to wean her from grave thoughts by tempting words of love. But father and mother and love and duty were something more than ideas to Lucy, and she resolved to withstand Harry's temptation. Her firm resolution to accept the consequences of her deception gave Harry's thoughts a new turn, and he exclaimed as he rose up, "Why is your father so cruel to us; why does he join with all the rest in worrying me?"

Then Lucy rose also, and putting her hands upon his shoulders, she said, "Oh, Harry, your anger frightens me; your tongue seems quite unbridled, your harsh words make me shudder as they pass, and I fear they may fall even on me."

"No, not on you, Lucy, not on you;" and in all sincerity Harry kissed that grim suspicion away with forgetful Lucy in his arms.

"But this must not be, Harry," said Lucy,

breaking from him. Then wavering she said, "And yet I cannot bring myself to think there *ought* to be an end of such quiet joy."

"There ought *not*," cried Harry fiercely. "What made us tremble when our hands first touched? Do you remember how the blood rushed through our veins and made us all aglow with a new life when our lips first met? Is it not clear that we are impelled by a mysterious power towards one another, and shall we treat such a command lightly? I say if any step in between us to divide us utterly, and teach us how to hate or even to cool our love, they are no friends of God!"

"Harry," said Lucy with decision, "that's wicked,—I'm sure that's not right."

"It is truth itself, Lucy. Answer me what I shall ask you, and then say how true it is."

Harry drew Lucy to their seat again as he said this, and when they had both sat down his voice was low and soft as he pleaded with her.

"Tell me, Lucy, did not our love steal upon us like the murmuring of distant music: so

harmonious that sweetness was its only quality, so perfect, that only One could have created it within us? Shall its charms be rudely broken? Is not our love, Lucy, like the opening of a flower, and shall that which none on earth can make be rudely crushed? Our love, Lucy, has awakened like the morning, and One only has the right to veil its beauty from us by ill-boding clouds."

This Lucy felt was the very essence of love, and greater happiness she could never hope for than to hear such sweet words whispered to her by Harry as she sat beside him. But her father's injunction still remained, and she felt her present happiness would but make her sorrow greater when the time of parting came. Harry noticed her sad looks, and tried to cheer her by pointing to the glad day and bidding her despond no more. But she answered, "I cannot be glad, Harry, when we're so near parting."

"Why need we part?" asked Harry with surprise; he thought he had nearly won her to his mind.

"Because my father bid me, Harry, nothing more."

"Your father!" repeated Harry with scorn as he rose, and Lucy winced to think that two she loved so well should be at variance. "I know why he bids you part from me," said Harry. "Do *you* know why he spurns me?"

"No," said Lucy frightened.

"He's angry with God for having made me. He'd have been satisfied if I'd been made of baser clay than he. Then he could with reason have pitied me, and taught you how to do the same."

"Oh, Harry, your harsh words will make our parting easier, though more sad for me. How can you love me and speak so of my father?"

"Because he does me wrong and gives you pain without a cause, for all of which he'll sorrow as sure as the sun goes down." Then after a pause Harry asked, "And will you cast me off indeed?"

"Harry, you must not interpret me so harshly. You know it's not my own will."

"And do you give me no hope?"

"Papa gave me none," said Lucy sadly.

"And you say you love me!" said Harry half-sneeringly and almost beside himself from suppressed passion. "You *think* you love me, but your love can be measured. If you thought it worth while, you could plumb its depth by a new plaything that you dallied with for a day."

Lucy uttered a sharp cry of pain, and burst into tears afresh. At sight of her grief Harry checked himself for a moment, and then in lower but no less bitter tones he said, "Perhaps it's wrong of me to charge you so harshly, but as your love is strong, so will be the bitterness of your repenting. Some time hence you'll remember this 'Good bye' with burning sorrow, and will weep tears ten times more bitter than to-day's; and the pride which prompts your father to deny me will turn and sting him, and he'll have no comforter in *his* repentings."

Harry's manner in giving this warning was so terrible in Lucy's eyes that she could not

answer him; she looked at him helplessly as he continued:

"Now, Lucy, I'll give you one parting word. In a short time you will want to undo what you have done to-day, and you will want to send for me, and that you may not shrink from doing so, I tell you that I expect it; and if, when the longing and the opportunity come upon you, you do not send for me, this day will remain with you as the blackest day of all your life, and the thoughts of it will freeze all love within you and leave you a prim pattern of passionless gentility."

With this Lucy burst into tears again, while Harry looked on almost callously as she prayed between her sobs that he would spare her.

"You are cruel!" she cried. "What love can you have for me to try me so?"

Still Harry looked on, careless what she suffered, his passion was so great. Then Lucy grew calm, and after a few moments' silence asked, "Cannot we be friends, and can't we say 'good-bye' in all sincerity and still hope?"

"Why that's what I wished of you," said Harry, "but you said you could not hope."

"I'm afraid I cannot help hoping," said Lucy in a sad state of bewilderment.

"Then let us hope," said Harry.

"But really to say good-bye," said Lucy, with a dim suspicion that to hope was not to part in reality.

"Yes," said Harry, "but to hope and to work."

Lucy promised, but still felt very doubtful; and after another short interval of silence, during which love played sad havoc with propriety and filial resolutions, she said Harry must take back the harsh words he had used towards her father, but Harry answered that he had only told her what might be. "And if your father should continue," he said, "to give us no hope, what I have said will come to pass."

Lucy sighed dolefully, but Harry comforted her: in a little while she had forgotten his harshness, and they sealed their parting and their pledge with a kiss.

CHAPTER II.

PATERNAL SPECTACLES.

Colonel Brandlebraine and Archibald Roylstone found themselves face to face on the platform of the Exeter Railway Station, journeying to London about a month after the same journey had been undertaken by Brian. Mr. Roylstone was going up on business touching the spheres, and was dreaming prodigiously; passion was the motive with Colonel Brandlebraine, and he was bristling with excitement. They were both equally surprised at their chance meeting.

"I'm glad to see you," said Mr. Roylstone absently. "Quite well?"

"Good day, sir," said the Colonel stiffly.

Mr. Roylstone glanced aside furtively; he

was sorry that his thoughts had been broken in upon by one who had met him so coldly; but the Colonel jumped to a totally different conclusion, and sternly inquired, "Is Margaret quite well?"

"I left her very well," said the great inventor, and after searching nervously in the neighbourhood of his boots, he added, "Mrs. Roylstone remains with her."

"Then she's not yet heard of your son's extraordinary proceedings; *your* son's *disgraceful* proceedings?" said the Colonel growing warm.

"Do you speak of Brian?" said Mr. Roylstone; then looking at his questioner almost fiercely, he said, "I have heard nothing; she's heard nothing warranting such a remark as that!"

Mr. Roylstone's nerves needed the tonic of offence to give them strength, and Colonel Brandlebraine's manner and words formed such a tonic. In an instant the nervous hesitating man became indignant, and would have dared even to be violent.

"Whatever you may have heard, sir," said Colonel Brandlebraine with increased dignity, and whatever she may have heard (and God forbid that my dear girl should hear more than is necessary of this dishonourable affair), I say, sir, that he has become a disgrace to you and to me; a curse to us all, sir."

The Colonel spoke hoarsely, and Mr. Roylstone answered, with a look which matched his words, "Upon my life I'm amazed."

"So was I, sir; I was astounded," said the Colonel, and thinking Mr. Roylstone was coming to his way of thinking, he went on, "It'll kill her, sir; so, for God's sake, keep it from her as long as you are able; and, above all, sir," he added, taking Mr. Roylstone by the arm, "keep him from her; don't let him come near her. I would rather that she died to-morrow than that he should set eyes on her again."

Mr. Roylstone had been looking towards the ground with the air of an irritated martyr, doubting whether he should bear with his friend's ravings or retort. At this last remark he half shook the Colonel's hand from his arm,

and, with his head slightly bent towards him, asked pettishly, "To whom do you refer?"

"In the name of Heaven, sir, to your son; to your, your—brutal son!"

"That's an insult to me," said Mr. Royl-stone sharply.

"An insult, sir? The insult is your son's; his profligate doings are in every one's mouth; they're the talk of the town. Many men do dishonour to their wives, but this man adds outrage to outrage, and degrades his wife before the world. By God, sir! I'd hold my life cheap if by risking it I could wipe out this stain, and stop the coming trouble!"

Then the old man's anger lessened, and he looked wistfully abroad, with his brow knit strongly. Mr. Roylstone in the meantime still wavered between enduring and resenting, but wished most earnestly that Colonel Brandle-braine had chosen some one else to worry with his groundless suspicions. Was it a friendly act to step in with his wild ravings between a great inventor and his fruitful contemplation? He had scarcely heard the Colonel's last re-

mark, and said, "Eh, what? What, in fact, has Brian been doing?"

"Doing, sir," cried the Colonel, "the devil's own work. He's got a perfect den in Leicester Square to begin with."

"What, his dining-hall? That's not a den—"

"Dining-hall!" exclaimed the Colonel with derision; but Mr. Roylstone went on:

"I'm told he has introduced contrivances of extraordinary ingenuity, and I intend dining there myself."

"Don't, sir; for God's sake, don't," cried the Colonel; "you're deceived; they'll say you are as bad as he."

"Let them," said Mr. Roylstone again, in a pet. "I've no wish to be better, since he's as good as need be. We'd better part, or we shall quarrel."

With this, Mr. Roylstone moved away, and the Colonel haughtily responded, "We *had* better part. If you're not in league with your son, you'll regret this curt behaviour."

"I'm in league with no one, and shall regret nothing. Good morning."

"Good morning," said the Colonel, red with rage; and the two parted to continue their journey as they had begun it, alone. And as they journeyed, the one felt more miserable, and the other more vain. The Colonel had begun to learn that the wrong which troubled him was peculiarly his own, and that none but those who had suffered in like manner would understand how great it was; Mr. Roylstone congratulated the world that he had overcome a tiresome obstacle between him and his thoughts, and he smilingly proceeded to revolve in imaginations with his spheres.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CARTER-STRIVER FINDS HIMSELF TAKEN INTO CONFIDENCE.

On a certain Thursday morning Mr. Carter-Striver contemplated the public in Pall Mall from his club window, and rejoiced that he was not as some other men,—as a cab-driver, for instance,—which he was prepared to admit to himself that he might have been if he had not dealt with the world skilfully. The contemplation of what he might have been was always extremely gratifying to Mr. Carter-Striver, because it never entered into his head to think that he might have been better than he was; he always considered himself as having, by sheer dexterity, escaped from something disreputable, and as having achieved the highest altitude attainable under the circumstances.

Regarded in that light, his actual position certainly bore incontrovertible testimony to his adroitness as a manager of men. The notion that he might have been a cabman seemed to have peculiar charms for him; he dwelt on it with zest, and by-and-by, bringing Mrs. Carter-Striver into the business, he imagined her at the bottom of their court—a bloated, red-faced blustering woman—in angry altercation with a rival cabman's wife, and aided in her abuse by Admarine, the eldest of seven grimy offspring; for Mr. Carter-Striver felt sure that he would have had at least seven children if he had become a cabman instead of a politician. He concluded with a haste ill-becoming a legislator, that the tall and somewhat limp hansom cab-driver who had suggested these complacent reflections had more than seven children, and that they were all as untidy as their father. The desire to ascertain exactly what he might have been, supposing he had gone down instead of up in life, was so strong upon him that he actually set out to take the cab to some secluded spot, ostensibly to make a call, but really to

worm out of the cabman something respecting his worldly condition. As he was going, however, it chanced that Mr. Algernon Trippes, a youthful but exceedingly knowing member of Parliament, claimed his attention, with a smiling countenance, as he stood directly in Mr. Carter-Striver's path. Mr. Trippes flattered himself that he was one of the few men abreast of the time in the matter of dress and deportment; accordingly he planted himself before Mr. Carter-Striver with his arms akimbo, a short stick in his right hand, and a harmless eyeglass in his left eye by way of balancing the ornamentation, and, as before stated, he smiled. Mr. Carter-Striver responded with eagerness, for the claims of society as represented by Mr. Trippes were not to be ignored by Mr. Carter-Striver, even for the sake of pursuing the gratifying study of himself as he might have been. Mr. Carver-Striver lent a listening ear to Mr. Trippes as the representative of the ornamental in society. Trippes's connections were extremely good; they had put him in Parliament and kept him there

without any trouble. Trippes never had anything so vulgar as individual opinions, and had all his thinking done for him; he was a safe party man, who always voted as he was told, and if the representative of his party did not tell him how to vote he declined to vote at all. He was an admirable specimen of your fancy legislator was Mr. Trippes, and Mr. Carter-Striver regarded him as very superior ballast, of which he was never likely to have too much; so he dismissed the cabman and his seven untidy children for the nonce and was at the service of Mr. Trippes, who observed, with an involuntary twinkle of the eye that made him drop his glass, "I say, you know, that's a rare go of Roylstone's, I say."

"Yes," said Mr. Carter-Striver, with a responsive twinkle, "I'm told it's eminently amusing."

"Oh, you know, amusing's not the word, my friend," said Mr. Trippes, almost gravely. "Amusing's not the word; it's positively damn fine. M'Genis has been, and he says it's absolutely The *Thing*, you know. It's a sort

of cross between a Pompeian banquet and the Parc aux Cerfs, you know; eh?"

"Quite classical," said Mr. Carter-Striver, putting himself on a level with Mr. Trippes without the slightest compunction.

"Improved up to the modern standard," added Mr. Trippes.

"But it'll take a Master of Arts to appreciate it thoroughly," said Mr. Carter-Striver, laughing.

"Deyvil a bit, sir; a child could appreciate it," said Mr. Trippes, carried away with enthusiasm; "Roylstone says it's reverting to first principles in nature and art, you know. Have you been?"

Mr. Carter-Striver stroked his chin and winked, as if occupied with pleasing recollections, but made no answer, and Mr. Trippes continued, "I hear old Brandlebraine's in a frightful stew about it; he calls it a public scandal; and I expect there'll be a terrible row in the house by-and-by."

"Yes," said Mr. Carter-Striver," with philosophical coolness, "I suppose he does not consider it quite as amusing as we do."

"I don't think it's altogether the correct sort of thing, mind you," moralized Mr. Trippes; "not the correct sort of thing, you know, as far as Roylstone's wife is concerned, because, you know, she's an uncommon fine woman, you know; eh?"

"Hist!" said Mr. Carter-Striver, "Here's Brandlebraine coming this way."

"Oh, is he?" said Trippes, without looking round. "Then, as I don't know him, I'll pass on, because, you know, his conversation won't be very cheerful; will it? and it isn't worth while to be introduced just to be bored; is it?"

"No," said Mr. Carter-Striver, laughing. "Good day."

The Colonel seemed to be less passionate, but only because his anger had wearied him; and he spoke hoarsely as he said to Mr. Carter-Striver, "Will you take a walk with me; I want your advice?"

"Oh, certainly; I shall be proud to give it;" said Mr. Carter-Striver, with a perceptible crane of the neck towards the Colonel, and out they went together.

"Let's ride," said the Colonel, "for I'm tired, but I feel bound to keep on the move; I feel as if I should like to be on a railway engine going at fifty miles an hour."

Mr. Carter-Striver, ever willing to oblige, hailed a cab, and found the driver was his slim and untidy friend.

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere," said the Colonel quickly.

"Great Western," called Mr. Carter-Striver.

"What are you going there for?" asked the Colonel in amazement.

"He'll drive fast to a railway station," was the answer. "Now, Colonel, what's the point?"

"Well," said the Colonel, as if he would have preferred to whisper, "you've heard of those infernal doings of Roylstone's."

"What, those dinners?" said Mr. Carter-Striver sternly.

"Confound it; you all call them dinners!" said the Colonel passionately. "It's more than dinners; upon my life it's most terrible."

The Colonel seemed to be greatly distressed as he said this, and with a view to conciliate

him his companion observed with alacrity, "Yes, certainly, it's something more than dinners; it's very objectionable."

"Objectionable, sir!" cried the Colonel, "I say it's most foul and damnable, sir!"

Mr. Carter-Striver felt uncomfortable at this, and thinking to mend matters, he said, pointing his finger at the Colonel's waistcoat-pocket, "You look at this matter as it affects your daughter."

"In the name of Heaven, sir, how else should I look at it?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," said Mr. Carter-Striver, who found that he had not made a point after all, and was consequently much discomposed.

"Now, this is a most serious matter," said the Colonel, after a pause, "and as much—everything may depend on the turn I give to affairs in the first instance, so I ask you as a friend, What should I do? What would you do?"

With one hand in his waistcoat-pocket and the other feeling his chin, Mr. Carter-Striver confessed that he didn't know.

"You've got a daughter!" cried the Colonel.

"Yes," said Mr. Carter-Striver, with an uncomfortable feeling that his was a different kind of daughter, and that he was a different kind of father; but he kept this to himself, and expressed the opinion that if it were his case he should do something very bad. "Something very bad," he repeated, in the full assurance that he was sufficiently indefinite to be safe.

The Colonel protested with an oath that he felt terribly near doing something very bad, and thus encouraged, Mr. Carter-Striver added that he thought he would get his daughter home as soon as possible.

"I will; I will. Brook Street, driver, and as fast as you can!" cried the Colonel; then becoming quiet and absent at the same time, he mused, "She shall come home to me, and we'll talk it over quietly,—as quietly as we can, and I'll be guided by her. She always advised me well in my own affairs, and this is hers."

This was said in part to Mr. Carter-Striver, who, however, began to regard his companion

with something approaching fear; indeed, at this point his only concern seemed to be to get rid of the Colonel as quickly as possible consistently with keeping on good terms with him. In due time he did get rid of him, by leaving him at his temporary residence in Brook Street. He then ordered the cabman to drive to Westminster Hall, and made haste to dismiss all thoughts touching the very unpleasant subject which had been forced upon his attention. It was not that he was ill-natured or selfish, he persuaded himself, that he disliked people who troubled him with their misfortunes; indeed, he was acknowledged to be very obliging and considerate of other people's feelings. The way in which he had been engaged previous to this self-examination was proof of this; a less worthy person would have declined any such confidences as Colonel Brandlebraine's as a nuisance; and Mr. Carter-Striver also assured himself that self-examination was practised by only the most moral, a reflection which made him feel quite good.

Having thus established his character as an amiable and most unselfish man, Mr. Carter-Striver searched his mind for some fresh subject for reflection, in order that he might not revert to the unpleasant topic from which he had escaped; and self-examination having produced self-satisfaction, his thoughts naturally glided to the subject from which they had been rudely torn by Mr. Trippes, so he again thought of what he might have been, and smiled. The reflection was fully as enticing as before; and when the cab had stopped at Westminster Hall and Mr. Carter-Striver was on the eve of paying the tall cabman, he drew back his hand and smiled again, much to the astonishment of the cabman, and not altogether to his satisfaction. "I will go somewhere else," said Mr. Carter-Striver confidentially; then he took out his watch, and added, "I want to make a call and come back, so we'll go by time, eh?"

The cabman assented, and Mr. Carter-Striver told him to drive to Clapham Common; and he nodded so confidentially as he

was getting into the cab, that the driver almost thought he winked.

In three minutes after starting, Mr. Carter-Striver had the loud-voiced wife and the seven children full in view; there was another quarrel going on with the woman over the way this time, and he was under the impression that his wife was getting the worst of it. Then he found himself coming home in a rage, discharged for abuse, and drunk in consequence; it was only natural that, under these circumstances, he should rail at his wife, and from this point the descent was rapid, until Mr. Carter-Striver actually found himself carrying a board at the Rudborough election, with half-a-dozen others as doleful in appearance as himself.

Mr. Carter-Striver was prevented from imagining any more distressing state of things than this by the arrival of the cab at the Windmill, where the driver stopped according to directions. Standing on the doorstep of the inn, Mr. Carter-Striver observed that they had come quickly, and, as it was too early

for his appointment, he proposed that they should see what the house could afford. The cabman bashfully responded to the invitation; and having secured a semi-private room, Mr. Carter-Striver asked him what he would take.

"Well, sir," said the cabman deliberately, "I don't often gratify my taste, but when I'm pressed, it takes the form of sherry and lemonade."

"Precisely my taste," said Mr. Carter-Striver, charmed with the coincidence. Then he gave the order, and, looking at his watch, declared that he had to wait twenty minutes; "so make yourself comfortable, my friend," said he, "and let's talk."

"Certainly, sir," said the cabman, taking an admiring sip of his lemonade and sherry; and Mr. Carter-Striver put a leading question: "You're a family man, I suppose," said he.

"Oh, yes," answered the cabman, "very much so; that is, I was, and it may turn out in doo course that I shall be so again, in a moderate way."

"Wife died, eh? children died too, eh?"

"Oh, dear no, sir, quite the contrairy, very much the contrairy, sir. I don't mind telling you, sir, in confidence, that I was indooced by circumstances of the most pressing nature, sir, to stop. Accordin' thereto, I had to hold on slack, as I'm a-holdin' on slack now."

"Indeed, how was that, eh? I'm afraid I don't quite understand, you know."

"Well, you see, sir, we begun early, me and the missis; I may say we begun very early," pursued the cabman, meditatively, "very early, sir. We begun at nineteen, and set off with twins at the very earliest opportunity, and continued without intromission, as it were, to add to our family with twins alternate, until our numbers come to fifteen."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Carter-Striver, "what an extremely large number!"

"That's percisely how it struck me, sir. The missis commenced life as a nussmaid, and babies seemed to come natural to her; so I turned the matter over in my mind, and I says, 'Now I'm earning from one to two pound a week at shoemaking, and we're all miserable;

so as we're all miserable, *very* miserable, I may say, I'd better go and be single for a time, without telling anybody.' And I says further, and I perdicted true, 'The consequence'll be that the missis and the whole fifteen will be *pro*vided for by the benevolent public as fur as possible; and as for them as the benevolent public doesn't *pro*vide for, why, the missis will carry on with her binding connection, and I'll save for 'em out of my earnin's, and perhaps drop 'em a little money from an unknown friend, you know, time and agin, if they want it very bad.' "

"But, my good friend," said Mr. Carter-Striver, "that was contrary to the law, you know, my friend."

"There ain't the smallest doubt o' that, sir, but have the kindness to remember, sir, there was fifteen of 'em, and every chance of more; in fact, there was a deed suttenty of more."

"But you know, my good friend, you made yourself liable to be imprisoned for desertion."

"True," said the cabman, "true; but you see, sir, there was fifteen of 'em; have the

goodness to keep that fact well in mind, sir," urged the cabman, with his forefinger planted in his left palm; "then grant me that it was my dooty to let that be the ultimatum, and I put it to you, sir, whether three months wasn't preferable to another pair of twins, 'cause, mind yer, twins was doo next."

Mr. Carter-Striver shook his head; and the cabman continued, with the confidence of a man who was making good his case, "I'm acting on the general advice of my respected parent, who was drowned on board the Sprightly Jane, in the German Ocean, five-and-twenty year ago. Says he, 'Corney, my boy, if ever you find the sea gettin' too strong for yer, let the ship run afore the wind, and haul to and belay when the luck turns. Dropping the nautical,' says he, 'when you find circumstances too much for yer, hold on slack, but keep a good look-out fore and aft, and when the wind shifts to a more *con*genial quarter, take the helm again yourself, and damn circumstances.' Beggin' your pardon, sir, but they was his very words, and accordingly I'm holdin' on slack this very minute."

"Very good advice, very good, in a general way," said Mr. Carter-Striver; "but, you know, you were defrauding the ratepayers and the benevolent public by throwing upon them the onus of supporting your family."

"I thought of that," exclaimed the cabman, with a slap on his knee as he smiled at his own ingenuity and the admirable fitness of his plan for securing the grand end in view; "I thought of all them things, and I feel perfectly sutten that anybody as will look at my case on the square in all its *par*ticulars, will come to the *con*clusion that I acted friendly to the public by holding on slack for a time. If I hadn't acted on my deceased parent's advice, to a dead suttenty we should have broke down right away with the next *con*signment o' twins, and the public would have had to take care of a good many of us for good and all. You don't suppose, sir, it was no sacrifice for me to leave 'em. Why, sir, there was little Howard Montgomery, our youngest, the chubbiest little chap as ever you see, just beginning to take notice when I come away. I do assure you,

sir," said the cabman, waxing warm, "that I was as sorry in my heart to leave 'em as you would be to leave yours, if so be you have them to leave, and I'm a-holdin' on slack, sir, at this minit 'cause I felt it was a public and a family dooty so to do."

It occurred to Mr. Carter-Striver, as an M.P., that the cabman's story would enable him to come out strong on the Poor Law in some way or other; he accordingly commenced questioning the man to that end, and in the first place asked, "Are there many 'holding on slack,' as you call it, my good man?"

"Not on principle, sir; there's many holdin' on slack, but without no sort of intention of returning to the bosom of their families when *cir*cum*stan*ces is easier."

"I suppose you don't happen to know how your wife has fared?" asked Mr. Carter-Striver, quite in the humour of a Select Committeeman.

"She's got on pretty well, sir. About a month after the *oc*casion when I went out to leave a pair of boots and never came back,

she was relieved of pretty well all her children *ex*ceptin' the youngest, and was pretty comfortable. But about Christmas time, sir, she had a hard time of it, and I sent her three pound by a post-office order, which quite set her up."

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Carter-Striver sharply.

"'Cause, sir, I was plying outside the Drury at the pantomime time, and saw the missis and four of 'em comin' out as jolly as if they'd never known what it was to be in a family of fifteen with nothing to eat. I was very glad to see 'em, sir, looking so hearty. There was Napoleon, which I've quite lost sight of him lately, carrying Howard Montgomery in his arms and walking aside his mother, and follerin' behind was Berlinda, which she had never been disposed of, 'and-in-'and with Arthur Wellesley; and they was all, as I was sayin', full of pleasu*ra*ble remembrances of the play, sir."

"And when are you going back?"

"Not at all, I hope, sir," said the cabman.

"I intends, sir, to go for'ard; and the very fust time I catch sight of my missis in the street I shall drive her home to her new residence, sir, and fetch what's left of the fifteen immediately after. It may happen to-morrow; it mayn't happen for three months or more, perhaps a year; but I feel sutten it will come some time or another."

Mr. Carter-Striver looked at his watch and rose up; the tall cabman also stood up, and, leaning over his fare, observed with extraordinary emphasis, "Have the kindness to remember, sir, there was fifteen of 'em; I do assure you, sir, fifteen is something very awful, very awful, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARET FALLS IN HER MOTHER-IN-LAW'S ESTIMATION.

During the week which followed Brian's departure from Boulderstairs Court, Margaret's manner gave evidence of none of the bitter thoughts which occupied her mind, and Mrs. Roylstone never ceased her wonted prattle for a single day. Then the monotony was broken by the departure of Mr. Roylstone, and still his wife continued most absurdly gay, doing her best according to her lights to enliven her daughter-in-law, and make things as cheerful as possible under circumstances, which though interesting, prevented them from engaging in the pursuit of fashion.

But the morning after Mr. Roylstone left,

Margaret appeared at the breakfast-table with the announcement that she intended going to town by the express.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Roylstone; "impos-si-ble."

Margaret did not answer, and Mrs. Roylstone asked in tones of the highest key, and the greatest surprise, "What in the name of fortune are you going for?"

"I want to see Brian," said Margaret curtly.

"Well, upon my word, you astonish me; I really thought you were a woman of sense."

"Brian has been away a week, and I have as yet heard nothing from him."

"Well, my dear, what does it matter?" said Mrs. Roylstone with complete indifference. "What does it matter? Really, my dear, I thought you were quite sensible."

Margaret said she was not aware that she had said anything particularly foolish.

"Why, my dear," continued Mrs. Roylstone. "Brian has been away only a week, and you want to go to town after him. That may not be exactly foolish, but it's fidgeting when

there's no occasion. Why, my dear, if he knew it, there would be no bearing him for conceit."

This point Mrs. Roylstone seemed to think was of the utmost importance, for after a moment's consideration she said, "You may perhaps think it rather peculiar of me to say so, but I was congratulating myself that you were properly indifferent about him, and that there was no danger of your making him think too much of himself. You must know, my dear, I have peculiar views about the men. Married or unmarried, the further you keep them the better. I distinctly declined, my dear, from the very first, to prance after my dear old stupid."

Mrs. Roylstone accompanied this observation with a triumphant smile, but Margaret without entering into a discussion on the management of men, simply expressed her unaltered determination to go to London. Mrs. Roylstone received the announcement with as much manifestation of surprise, as if she had then heard it for the first time.

"Why goodness gracious! my dear Margaret, what can you be thinking of? You've actually got your nurse in the house."

"She can return with me," said Margaret. "The only thing that weighs against my resolution is leaving you alone until Mr. Roylstone returns."

"That's a trifle, the merest trifle; put that aside and think of yourself. Just imagine what a dreadful thing it would be if anything was to happen at Swindon Junction. I should go mad; I declare to goodness I should go perfectly mad; the talk would be absolutely dreadful, my dear."

This consideration was, in the estimation of Mrs. Roylstone, of such great weight that she asked permission to accompany Margaret, if she persisted in her determination, and the result was that she found herself on the road to London that afternoon. The journey was completed without mishap, but Margaret's reserve was very trying to Mrs. Roylstone, who endeavoured to drown her annoyance by continual prattle, relieved by an occasional

examination of Margaret's countenance, which, however, from its sternness, only induced greater curiosity with regard to Margaret's thoughts and intentions.

Brian's house was in Grosvenor Street, and on reaching it, Margaret asked the footman with her accustomed composure, when he expected his master. The man replied that Brian had not sent word of his return.

"When was he last here?"

"Not since you left town, ma'am."

"Then he must have stopped at Pritchard's," said Margaret in a careless tone, as she passed on, but she turned a look full of meaning on Mrs. Roylstone, whose forehead became alarmingly creased with astonishment as she followed Margaret upstairs.

When they had reached the sitting-room, Margaret asked with something of reproach in her voice, "Where's Brian?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Roylstone, with her head erect as if for conflict, "how in the world should I know?"

Margaret's eyes fell, and languidly sinking

on a couch, she rested her forehead on her hands and pleaded, "*I* should know."

Mrs. Roylstone put all this down to physical infirmity, and smiling significantly observed, "Come, come, my dear, you'll take a better view of things by-and-by. Brian is no doubt staying with a friend, as you suppose. Let's have a little dinner or some tea, and then you can get rested, for you're tired, you know, you're tired," said Mrs. Roylstone with charming grace.

But Margaret refused to be comforted in this fashion, though she was indeed tired. Her pride and haughtiness were altogether cast down in this hour of humiliation; she burst into tears and declared she was full of wretchedness with none to help her. Still Mrs. Roylstone smiled complacently, and indolently offered, at odd times, scraps of matronly comfort.

That night Mrs. Roylstone announced that she was promoted to the distinguished relationship of granddame, and this incident, in her estimation, accounted for everything.

CHAPTER V.

BRIAN'S SON.

BRIAN'S son had been born six weeks, yet had he not come to welcome him; so Margaret's heart was still full of sadness. But her new love had its way; and as her old anger had given place to quiet grief, that grief was in due season tempered by hope, and sometimes hope weaned her thoughts from Brian altogether. These were happy times.

Once, at midnight, when the air was still and the light burnt dimly in her chamber, she watched her boy as he lay sleeping by her side. His little hand clasped her finger with a lusty grasp, his lips pouted in mock sternness, and her breath lifted the down from his forehead, as she prayed her well-considered prayer: "Keep him, oh thou God of Heaven; lightly

burden him with care; guide him ever with Thy wisdom; bring him to Thyself in prayer. In whatever path he travel, with the lowly or the high; be the journey smooth or ruffled, and whate'er the age he die; when besieged with doubt, he wavers—wavers 'twixt the right and wrong,—guide his footsteps; oh, our Father, lead him by the hand along. May he love Thee and be lovèd by Thine everlasting Son; may he worship Thee, the holy; may Thy will by him be done."

The boy slept on, with his grave little face still passionless, but his mother trembled as she looked on him, and presently she broke into involuntary prayer. "Oh, God of Heaven, let not this child be reared up by his father's hand, or in his father's ways; rather let him die beside me now. Rather let this wavelet be broken and dissolved before it gathers strength for good or ill, than growing in ungodliness, as well as life, it should rear a murky sin-begrimed crest to mock its Maker in High Heaven!"

She whispered hoarsely and in terrible ear-

nestness, with her right arm lifted high, and her body half raised in her bed. She did not pray, "Thy will be done;" she did not plead for power to keep her boy in godliness and purity; she seemed to doubt even God's power to keep him, and in her love for him she prayed more earnestly for his death in innocence, than for his wellbeing in life. And the boy slept gently on.

But in the morning she found her bitter prayer was answered. She kissed her boy, but his face was cold, wrapped in the mysterious solemnity of death; she lifted his little hand, but it fell listless on the pillow where he lay; she sought for the fitful breathing of a sickening child, but sought in vain; she sought for signs of life, but found only the awful sternness with which death seals even the face of a child.

Then the mother's wail went up to Heaven, and she reproached God for forsaking her,—she who had so little faith.

And Brian continued his revellings still.

CHAPTER VI.

HARRY WILLWEND UPBRAIDS THE WORLD BY INFERENCE.

JULIAN Leep marked Harry's newly-acquired habit of brooding over the fire at night and his generally doleful aspect; he accordingly watched him with much interest, and from one or two remarks which Harry, in the fulness of his heart or the heat of his passion, let fall, Julian guessed the main cause of his discomfort, and was at no loss to understand the rather vague references which Harry afterwards made from time to time to the delicate subject which pressed upon him. But Julian desired to give him some paternal advice; so when he found him one night consulting the flames and the curling smoke, with an unread book upon his knee, Julian drew his chair near him and

rubbed his hands as he said, in his cheerful way, "This is the third time, my boy, I've found you reproving the world by inference with your gloomy countenance and doleful attitude. What has the world been doing?"

"Doing ill," said Harry.

"Of course it has, my boy; it always does; and have you found it a jealous world?"

Harry clearly understood that Julian desired information, and he preferred this way of informing him to any other, so he readily answered, "No, I've found the world selfish."

"Ay," said Julian, as if pleased to hear it; "and how was it selfish this time? Not in a new way, I'll be bound."

"A man of the name of Merrington has found a new way," said Harry.

This was light and confirmation to Julian, but he coolly replied, "No, no, my boy, this most ingenious world has been selfish from Eve downwards, and no new way's to be found."

"His way is new to me," said Harry, still moodily.

"Ay, ay, my boy, but the wayward world

always runs in the same old tracks, and by-and-by they'll be old to you. But has our reverend friend no excuse for helping the world to be selfish?"

"Is a man to be excused for binding a young life down to a narrow groove, that it may be a joy to none but himself, while he blights another life by the way?"

"Oh, dear no," said Mr. Leep; "certainly not."

"But that's what he has done!" cried Harry, no longer moody, but fired with his indignation. "He has stepped in between us and seeks to destroy our young love, that my future may be blighted and hers may be warped to his crabbed model."

"Ah," said Julian; "and what are our reverend friend's reasons?"

"He has none but what are bad," said Harry fiercely; and then, in a voice tempered almost to tears, he added, "He can charge me with nothing but that I am alone in the world save for your kind care of me. His reasons are all begotten of pride; he thinks my very existence

dishonourable to the God who made us both; and does he not mock his Master when he gathers up his skirts and bids me stand off from him?"

"Ah," said Julian, half assenting.

Then Harry turned to him again and flung out another bitter speech, "His reasons are given him by the devil, who tempts him to spurn me and thwart God."

"Ah," said Julian, as if the conversation was of the most ordinary description, and not altogether wanting in amusement; "and how does he thwart God?"

Harry was silent for a moment, and then he spoke somewhat timidly of the sweet music, the fair flower, and the awakening morning that he had told Lucy had no human origin.

Julian listened with great glee, and when Harry had done, he cried, "And you sang this pretty little anthem in her ear, you rascal, did you?"

Harry nodded, and Julian danced about the room as he responded, "Oh dear, oh dear, what an artful dog; she believed you, of course,

you amusing rascal? Oh dear, how amusing; how delightfully simple!"

Harry was unable to discover the art and simplicity which so amused Julian, and told him so. Thereupon Julian exclaimed, with fresh demonstrations of pleasure, "Oh, you droll fish and most entertaining of lovers, your simplicity is most refreshing. Have you lived for nearly twenty years without learning that in this fair world devils delight in destruction, discord, and decay? Have you never seen the fairest morning marred by the rising of the blackest of clouds, the sweetest music made vile by the braying of an ass, and the fairest flowers crushed by the feet of fools, nipped by a night's frost, or withered even by the sun which tempted them to unfold? Where can your wits have been, my boy, not to count the discords which make up the harmony of nature?"

"It's as well that I forgot them," said Harry, "as it was not necessary to my purpose to remember them. But may we not, granting your reminder, examine the figures further?

Then what do we see? Why, according to your own account, it's the devils who delight in discord; and I say your reverend friend (for he is none of mine) is prompted by one of the discordant devils to destroy what is beautiful and make two persons miserable in order to spite himself on one."

"And what if he is, my doleful youth? and what if he yields to the prompting, and what if he's altogether wrong and you're altogether right? What is it but the way of the wilful world that persists in its godlessness?"

"But why is it godless?" cried Harry, in a passion. "Why does it come between me and my best hopes to blight them?"

"Because that's precisely its way of doing things. It says you rejoice in being, and as you delight in the verb to be, you must follow it up with the verbs to do and to suffer."

"But I don't rejoice in being," Harry protested; and Julian broke in, "No matter for that; the playful world will have it you do, and treats you accordingly."

"Then why doesn't the world act diffe-

rently? why, in fact, isn't it more considerate?" asked Harry laughing.

"Because it would then be a dull world; whereas it is now lively with our squabbling. When everything goes right in the world, no one will care to live in it, and so it will come to an end."

Harry sat silently brooding for a moment or two, and then said hoarsely, "It's very hard, whether it's the way of the world or not; and whether it's necessary or not, it's very hard!" He paused a moment and then said, with more of bitterness and defiance in his voice than sorrow, "I had no choice whether I would be or not. I would rather have died upon the threshold of the world than have come to be despised."

This sounded so much like the groan of one at bay that the old man pitied Harry in silence; but after a brief watching of the flames in company, he put his arm round Harry's shoulders and whispered in his ear, "There was One, Harry, my boy, who came for nothing else but to do the people good, and Him they spat upon."

CHAPTER VII.

NOR WILL LUCY BE COMFORTED.

THE satisfaction which Lucy felt at having said good-bye to Harry was much diminished by the feeling that she had deceived her father. She was, it is true, in some doubt as to whether the promise she had made Harry to hope for better times had not something to do with the depression which weighed upon her; but whatever the cause, her heart was heavy within her, and she went gravely to her father to unburden herself.

"We have said good-bye, papa," she said, as she came to his side in the library.

"I am very glad to hear it, Lucy. I think you have done very wisely, and some day you also will understand how wisely."

Then Lucy confessed her grievous fault, as

she esteemed it, and told her father, with many tears, that she and Harry were much more to each other than very good friends; "and," she said "we were both very sorry to say good-bye. I more than he, I think."

"Dear me, how unfortunate, how very distressing!" said Mr. Merrington, in a painful state of excitement; and Lucy's hopes rose high; she thought her father regretted having bidden them to say good-bye, but he continued, in a tone of the deepest distress, "Why, Lucy, did you not let me know of your intimacy with him before? I would at once have stopped it. You can little comprehend the danger you have run, the fears you have excited within me, the distress that even now may result from your indiscretion."

Harry's temper was the only cause she could conceive of to account for the strength of her father's feeling upon the matter, and she was silent.

"Why, Lucy," Mr. Merrington continued with fervour; "he's an outcast—a lost one, my dear; he's not fit for you to touch; the mark of sin is upon him, my dear girl."

Lucy's bewilderment increased. She did not doubt her father for a moment, but as she knelt by his side she could not help asking him how Harry was so great a sinner, and her father answered solemnly, "There are some sins, my dear, which it is better that the pure should not even know of. That poor young man was born in sin, and it would be better if we put him wholly out of our memory; it is better that you should not know of the nature of his misfortune, better that you should remember him only as one who has been unfortunate."

Lucy heard, and between her sobs she told her father that though they had said good-bye, she had promsed Harry to hope for better times.

"Ah, Lucy," said Mr. Merrington, much moved, "you cannot conceive how much better it would have been if you had not promised to hope; for how can you hope after what I have told you?"

Lucy sobbed assent to this, and they were silent for a time. Then Mr. Merrington said,

"Come, Lucy, we must put all remembrance of him aside, and if you hope for better times, those times must be his future happiness and acceptance with God; and the sooner you begin to school yourself to this, the easier the task will be."

Still Lucy sobbed, and when her father urged her to rise and compose herself, she stopped weeping with an effort, and said, "Yes, papa; but as we were parting, he looked so stern at me, and 'Lucy,' he said, 'you'll not forget this day. You'll remember it for many years to come, and you'll regret it; and your father, he'll be sorry for you too; and both of you will wish we had never said good-bye.' What can he mean, papa?" exclaimed Lucy, "and what will happen to us?"

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," he answered, as he smoothed her hair and dried her eyes; but his hands shook from love and fear,—love, that made him give his daughter pain for what he thought her good, and fear lest the pain should harm her. Added to these was the feeling that Harry might become pos-

sessed with a desire to work them ill, and at length he asked suspiciously, "When he spoke of our regretting your parting, he didn't threaten us with evil, did he?"

"No, papa, but he made me fear evil would come; and oh, papa, he said he knew why you spurned him; and he seemed so pained to think you did so, that I quite pitied him."

"Yes, Lucy, I also pity him; but let us put the whole matter away from us; let us put it away; let us cast it behind us; let us bury it in forgetfulness; let us forget it utterly."

As he said this with a superstitious earnestness quite unusual in him, he kept his hand upon the weeping girl's head. He seemed anxious to pile up resolve upon resolve, and press the measure down upon the obliterated memory of Harry and her love. Presently, however, Lucy said, "But tell me, papa, whom am I to love now?"

"Your mother and me, my dear," he answered with bated breath; "your good mother and me."

"Yes, papa, I do love you, but that's different, so different; and oh, papa! I can't help saying it, I'm afraid there'll be no one else for me to love; and I'm so afraid I shall die if no one comes, and you feel you cannot call him back."

"Hush, hush, my dear, let's wait and see whether any will come, for as yet you are full young to love in that way," he added more cheerfully.

They waited, but none came, nor did they call Harry back; and Lucy, so capable of loving, had none to lavish the blessed gift upon, and so sighed her listless life away as she did her father's hard bidding. And he, good man, promised himself a noble husband for his dear Lucy;—a man of birth and station, of talent and position, he looked for,—a man having a form to be proud of and a heart that could love. He should be a prize worthy of her, the fond father thought, and he looked abroad for him!

CHAPTER VIII.

JULIAN LEEP CONSULTS WITH HIS CONFEDERATE.

Mr. Merrington had another visitor that day, Julian Leep, to wit, come of his own accord. Mr. Merrington received him with pleasant smiles and cheerful words of greeting, but made no mention of his trouble of the morning, nor of any intention to call Harry back. All that was unalterably settled according to clearly defined principles ever present in Mr. Merrington's mind.

Julian opened the business, sitting on the extreme edge of a chair with his tall hat on the floor beside him, as he asked, "And how long is it, my reverend friend, since we made a certain arrangement touching my most devoted son?"

Mr. Merrington was about to say that he could ascertain by reference, when Julian cried, "Four years and more, my reverend friend, and I assure you our excellent youth makes most exemplary progress. He's not an idle drone, but the busiest of bees, continually making honey, in the shape of golden guineas, from the dullest, deadest, driest old leaves that were ever glued together and hidden away from the sun for years and years."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Mr. Merrington, "very glad indeed. I'm sure you deserve to have him get on, for you have certainly taken great care of him, and have helped him far more than I have."

"No, no, my most reverend friend, that's contrary to Cocker. What did our wisest of men say? 'Money answereth all things,' eh? And what would have been the use of our fanciful notions about ready-made families, and what would have become of my chance of a golden autumn, and where would have been my hopes of a remnant of good cheer in my snowy winter, if we had not the money to pay

for our spades, our pruning-hooks, and our gardeners withal? Without money our roots would have thirsted in vain for the stream, our branches would never have drawn life from the earth, our leaves would have fruitlessly sighed for the dew; so should we all have wasted and withered away! In sooth, we are much indebted to our reverend friend."

"For one's acts to be so well appreciated," said Mr. Merrington cheerfully, "is, I'm sure, the best possible recompense."

"And," Julian struck in, "when the sapling bears fruit, the gardener should be encouraged to tend it afresh."

"Well," said Mr. Merrington, "and what is the meditated step now?"

"The step for life, and our young friend proposes a bold step. The old saw says that he who aims at the moon will hit high, and our most aspiring youth aims at the woolsack, —not that he's told me, but *I* know it. Digging and diving and delving among the rows of books on my shelves, he's got all the lawyers, and all the poets, and all the statesmen,

their lives, their writings, and their speeches, in a noble row together. And he knows them so well,—has matched the dead with the living, and become so familiar with them that he's only waiting until he earns enough to start with."

"But, my dear Mr. Leep," exclaimed Mr. Merrington, "the law is a profession!"

"Good," responded Julian; "a most noble one!"

"Never intended for such a one as he," cried Mr. Merrington excitedly.

"Why not?" asked Julian sharply.

"The law is a profession engaged in by none but gentlemen. He might as well enter the Church at once," added Mr. Merrington, as if there had never been a fisherman or tax-gatherer in the Church in the whole course of its history.

"No," cried Julian, clapping his hands on his knees; and it was Mr. Merrington's turn to ask "Why?"

"Because, my most reverend friend, he hasn't *chosen* the Church! He might have chosen the army, the sea, or the city; or he

might have preferred the life of an idler; but he's not, my reverend friend; he has chosen the most laborious of occupations, and has been confirmed in the fever by our mutual friend Mr. Guffey."

"Who's a f— anything but wise," said Mr. Merrington.

"But he's uncommonly good." added Julian sharply.

Then Mr. Merrington pondered over the matter for a moment or two, while Julian watched him eagerly, in perfect readiness to fling his words back at him if they didn't suit. Presently Mr. Merrington said, "I'm afraid, Mr. Leep, I should not be justified in joining with you in this matter; I consider it as an indiscreet step."

"My most reverend sir, I've only come for your consent to allow me to do it myself. Your generosity has purchased a voice in all my movements in this matter; and I come to you, the best of advisers, for permission to let this thing be done."

"If I withdraw from the whole affair my permission will not be needed."

"Pardon me, reverend sir, it will. The venture will be made with money he has earned, with money I have saved from your money, and with help from our mutual friend, Mr. Guffey. But as we look upon it as pure speculation and an absolute casting of our bread upon the waters, most reverend sir, by all that's precious I could not think of casting anybody's bread but what is undoubtedly my own without full permission: so, if you will, the money which I have saved from your money shall be devoted to some other less speculative purpose to be named by you. But, mark you, I shall be sparing with the money, and make the youth struggle and strive, and pinch and squeeze, and work, work, work, while the passion lasts, and then he'll not feel it so much when he really is in harness and driven hard."

"If by judicious management you've not needed to spend all the share which I have contributed," said Mr. Merrington, "the skill was yours, and the saving is yours, not mine: so you have a perfect right to deal with it as you please; but if you insist on having yea or

nay from me, I must consent, simply because I have no power to dissent."

"Pardon me, reverend sir," exclaimed Julian, with extended hands, "if I say I looked for a less grudging consent. Your generosity up to this time warranted me in thinking you, my reverend friend, would have joined with me in rejoicing that our mutual labour had not been in vain."

Mr. Merrington's conscience smote him, but not with such a shock as that given him by the declaration that Harry Willwend was going to the bar; so he washed his hands of the whole matter with consummate dignity. Said he, "Your self-denying conduct does you honour, Mr. Leep; I have assisted you up to this time as far as I have been able consistently with my duty. You have my full permission to deal with the matter from this time forth just as your own judgment may dictate, and I trust you may have no cause to repent any step which you may decide to make."

Mr. Merrington coughed, and waived the whole subject, including Mr. Leep, out of the

room. But his visitor, a marvel of persistency, remained bowing in the doorway with one last request. "It would afford me immense satisfaction, my best of advisers, if in future seasons of doubt and perplexity I had permission to seek a consultation with you."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Merrington, with a leaven of affectation. He felt he had not come well out of the contest, and thought he would throw in a little Christian charity as a makeweight.

Julian bowed a profusion of bows and uttered a thousand thanks on taking his leave; but on his way home he called on the world to witness that his most reverend friend was like his fellows. "He'll give," said he, "with the most profuse benevolence, and he'll patronize with richest words, as long as the wretch he helps is a long way down; but when he finds the wretch creeping unpleasantly near, transformed by fortune smiling on industry, he whips up his holy garments and husbands his accomplished graces for others meet for his alms."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST PORTION OF THE RECKONING.

THE meeting-place of the gods in Leicester Square was deserted on the appearance of the hunter's moon by all save one, and that a woman. The gods had tired of their plaything; the means of their entertainment, human as well as mechanical, were flung aside with the empty bottles and cigar ends, and for aught the gods cared, they might have been trodden underfoot together. So all had gone whither they listed but this one, and she sat on the floor of an otherwise empty attic, nursing her knees and moodily feeding on her misery. She was young and gentle-looking, with long brown hair and large dark eyes; but her hair was all uncombed, and her eyes were filled with tears. She had not been long

in the world as she now knew it; the fair promises which led her to the meeting-place of the gods had appeared to her fair indeed, and by them she fashioned her young hopes; but the promises were broken, the young hopes died, and now she was left utterly alone.

But as she nurses her knees and moans, she hears a heavy step upon the stairs; in a moment she is standing in the shadow of the attic-window, and the stars look down upon her as they coyly break through the twilight. Presently the door opens, and Abram Jenkins appears; his bullet head, with its freckles and coarse black hair, is especially against him to-night as he flings a malevolent look round the room. An involuntary shudder, and the merest flutter of the girl's dress brings the malevolent look to the window and words to Abram's lips. They are coarse, unmanly words, and though meant to be enticing, smite hard, so hard that the girl turns, and quick as thought, flies from the room, nor will she turn, though Abram calls to her with promises as well as threats. In another minute she is

in the street a homeless outcast, almost God-forgotten, whom the very dogs look askance at, and whom Charity avoids.

Brian Roylstone at Brighton, reclining on a couch and breaking his fast with coffee and a cigar, discussed the affairs of the world with Mr. Trippes, M.P., and passed judgment on society. Brian maintained that society was unreasonable. Here had he been introducing for the entertainment of gentlemen a perfectly novel and unusually lively series of dinner-parties, and the consequence had been that old gentlemen had systematically shaken their heads at him; some of the weaker sort of young men had done the same, and his wife had absolutely gone off arm-in-arm with her father, the very pink of propriety, and positively declined to return. Mr. Trippes, with a view to save trouble, made it a rule of life never to argue, but always to agree with every one; he accordingly agreed with Brian in every particular, and solaced him with the suggestion that it would be all the same a hundred years hence. Brian was happy in

the hope that it would be all the same a year hence, thanks to society's short memory, and his hopes had received special confirmation already from the fact that all the most accomplished young ladies of his acquaintance, with a few undesirable exceptions, continued to smile on him as before. Mr. Trippes sagely concluded, with unusual perception, that these excepted ones were undesirable only because they did not smile as before. Brian protested this was not so, and said he, "Scandal does not hurt your man of property, you know, Trippes; it's your poor devils who want preferment and bread and cheese whom scandal hobbles."

"Not heirs of entailed estates, eh?" said Mr. Trippes, taking an admiring look through his glass at the hopeful heir of Boulderstairs, who responded, "Not even when they put up for seats."

"Provided they're safe ones," said Mr. Trippes.

"Like yours," added Brian. Then they both laughed to think the world was still en-

during and endurable, and in the midst of their merriment, Abram Jenkins appeared with the door-key of the house in Leicester Square.

"Here's the key, sir," said he; "and there's a gentleman of the name of Hubble wants to see you, sir."

"Who the dayvle's Hubble?" asked Mr. Trippes.

"A solicitor, apparently," said Brian, handing Mr. Trippes the visitor's card. Then turning to Abram, he asked, "What was doing at Leicester Square?"

"I was find only one young woman, sir."

"And you started her," said Brian sharply.

Abram turned red as he stammered out, "Yes, sir," and was gone.

Immediately afterward he introduced Mr. Hubble, a staid and portly gentleman, grey-headed and spectacled, minus two front teeth, but voluble of speech. He stood with his hat in one hand and his walking-stick firmly planted on the floor as he asked, with a cheerful countenance, "Have I the honour of addressing Mr. Brian Roylstone?"

Brian bowed, and invited the old gentleman to be seated; but still standing, he continued, "Will Mr. Brian Roylstone excuse me if I say I am under the impression he would prefer that I conducted my business with him in private."

Brian answered by introducing Mr. Trippes as his confidential friend.

"Very good," said the old man, putting his hat and stick on a chair, and sitting down with remarkable alacrity; "very good, sir; let's begin business."

Then taking some papers from his pocket he commenced looking through them; but presently he stopped in his search, and turning sharp upon Brian, said, as he looked at him over his spectacles, "I come from my client, Colonel Brandlebraine, who is unable to come himself, because he's ill."

The old man returned as sharply to his papers, but Brian asked, "What's the matter with the old buck?"

"A broken heart," was the prompt reply.

"The dayvel," cried Mr. Trippes, "and at his time of life, too."

Mr. Hubble looked over his spectacles at Mr. Trippes, for full five minutes Mr. Trippes thought, and then turning sharply on Brian, said with marked emphasis, "Your confidential friend here does not behave as if he were worthy of the confidence of a *gentleman*."

"Well, well," said Brian, "leave my friend to me."

"I will," said Mr. Hubble emphatically, and Mr. Trippes subsided.

Then holding a sheet of parchment in his hand, the lawyer proceeded, "My client has on one or two occasions written to you for the name of your solicitor; you have not replied to him, so I have come to deal with you yourself."

Brian bowed, and the old man continued, as Mr. Trippes sucked the head of his cane, but was otherwise as a piece of furniture, "I have come to make a distinct proposition to you in behalf of my client, Colonel Brandlebraine, on the part of your wife. I am instructed to propose that you sign this covenant, agreeing to an entire separation between you and your

wife, Margaret Mary, and renouncing on your part all claim over her jointure and paraphernalia. She on her part will renounce all her rights and privileges as your wife, so that you will both become as if you had never been married. That, sir, is the simple intent of this parchment, which I now leave with you, and you will be good enough to return it to me signed or rejected within fourteen days, when, in the first event, I will hand you or your solicitor a similar covenant signed by my client's daughter."

Mr. Hubble rose and handed the parchment to Brian, who replaced it on the table, saying, "If you have correctly described the document, I can give you my answer at once."

"Will you pardon me for saying it is not a matter which should be decided hastily? I have instructions to wait fourteen days for your rejoinder."

"I don't want fourteen days or fourteen hours. You have your answer now; the proposal is rejected."

"You had better consider, sir," said Mr.

Hubble, with all his sprightliness and geniality restored. "Sleep upon it, sir; further proceedings will not be taken for fourteen days."

"But, my dear sir," said Brian, "I have no desire for a separation or a renunciation of anything, and I dare say Mrs. Roylstone will be very glad I have no such desire when she has got over this fit of the tantrums. You understand women, Mr. Hubble?"

"No, sir?" was the prompt reply. "Women I do not understand; they constitute a riddle that I have given up long ago. But this I know for a positive fact: my client's daughter is no ordinary woman, and that she will not change her mind I am convinced."

"Then take my answer now; I wish things to remain as they are until a woman's shifting fancy lies in a fair quarter again."

"Well, if that's your answer I must take it; but I'd certainly recommend you to wait, sir. Now, won't you sleep upon it?"

Brian shook his head, and the old man went on. "You won't; well, there's an end of my

professional business with you for this time. But I am also commissioned as a gentleman and as a friend of my client's daughter to give you this note. Why she could not have sent it by the penny post I don't know; why she wished me to bring it I don't know; why she should send it at all I don't know. It's not for a man to find reasons for anything a woman does."

Mr. Hubble stood ready for going as he made this last remark, which Brian endorsed with the strongest emphasis; but Mr. Trippes, presuming upon his intimate acquaintance with a "number of very fine women," thought them easier to comprehend than anything in the world, "except when you come to getting at their reasons for liking or disliking a fellow, you know."

Brian subjected Mr. Trippes to a moderate amount of banter on account of this remark, and when he had ended, Mr. Hubble, who had been watching them with much amusement, said, "Your confidential friend seems to have a confident opinion of his own capabilities in

this respect; but if he will forgive the constructive discourtesy, I should say that he's the first gentleman I have ever met who professed to so much knowledge. At the same time, sir, I hope I may consider you as fortunate in having at your elbow so learned a professor upon an occasion so extraordinary as the present. Good morning, sir."

When Brian had bowed the solicitor out, he opened the letter and read as follows:—

"To Brian Roylstone.

"When we were in Paris on our marriage trip, news came to us of Alexander's death, as you remember well, and I remember how your brutal exultation at a brother's death startled me, and made me shrink from you. You guessed then, and rightly too, that a stronger, deeper, more engrossing feeling stifled the contempt for you your sated avarice at first awoke in me. But you've never yet discovered what that feeling really was, and had you honoured your marriage vows you never should have known; mine alone should have been the crime. But what it was my endea-

vour to conceal when we were one, has, now that we are two, become for evermore my chief desire to publish to the world. So will I publish it when the time comes.

"MARGARET MARY BRANDLEBRAINE."

Brian read this letter over thrice, and each time bit his lip, as much in anger that the letter troubled him as in doubt what evil Margaret designed. Presently he read the letter to Mr. Trippes, who was practising deportment before the window; and Mr. Trippes having given his undivided attention to the letter for two minutes, delivered the following opinion, "That's a deep trick of hers, my boy; she's desperately sweet on you, and wants you to send for her back and say you forgive her. That's their way, bless you," concluded Mr. Trippes with the over-confident air of a man bent on sustaining a disputed position.

Brian accepted this opinion as if he believed it, but he knew how false and worthless it was. He remembered well the shadow from high above Boulderstairs which had beckoned

him over the sea, and how, taking its stand 'twixt him and Margaret, it made him slink away from her, set his conscience to upbraid him, filled his mind with all imaginable fears, and stuffed her heart with jealousy. So Love, who never yet had bound them, hid his face for shame, and Hymen blushed to think his gentle bonds should clamp them.

It was a brisk night in London; the wind had a good bit of east in it; the air was clear, and the hunter's moon, a rare one for brilliance, rose high in the heavens. It was a grand night at Brighton for a gallop or a walk by the sea; it was a proud night for the hale and warmly clad wherever they strode on God's earth and spurned the dust; but oh! it was a cruel night for the homeless and hungry, the weak and the naked. Such a night it was to Carry Pavey, hugging the cold shelter of the closed shops, whose every bar was a reproach, whispering distrust of her who had been robbed of all the world had given, and much her God had lent to her.

But thus it had fallen out. Though re-

spected and not unloved a little while ago, she was counted vile to-day, because she had been foully treated yesterday. And who was strong enough in this weak world to help it? What if she wept and moaned, and moaned and wept, she was herded with the impious; and what if she limped on weary and footsore, and what if her tale was sad! Which of the thousand and one impostors of that night could not have told as sorrowful a tale or limped as deftly as she? So she had wandered a night and a day, and for a second night she wanders still, and the charitable pass her by as unworthy of their alms. God be merciful to those who, by their prowling trade of crime and beggary by turns, cast a reproach upon poverty and scare kind charity herself from the poor indeed. And shall we also say God be merciful to those who, in their wantonness, took this woman's name, and, having blown upon it with foul breath, cast it out a tainted thing upon the world!

But at last she thought she had found a friend, as, standing on the bridge in the very dead of

night, she turned from the sleepy city and gazed on the darkly glistening water with overweening hopes of rest. The wind was very strong on the river, and, looking upward, she saw that the glass of the lamp above her was broken, and that the wind driving at the flame was making the poor buffeted thing shudder again; now it would struggle hard to keep its place, and then when a stronger gust came it would strive and shake, and, doubling, would whirl round and round as if it would evade the cruel wind, and, flying upward, be at rest, but its little house held it still, and still it fretted, chased by the fitful wind. Then came a stronger and still stronger gust, the spent flame broke away, and the wild wind whistled through its little house, rejoicing with the spirit of death.

That same instant the woman's figure rose black and horrid on the parapet of the bridge; she ran swiftly to the centre of the arch, and as her arms were raised high in the air and her wild shriek was borne on the bitter wind, her giant shadow, cast by the moon upon the river,

seemed to beckon her to the water. In another moment they had embraced, and were covered by the darkly glistening river.

* * * * *

"Oi 'ev 'er, chaps. Steady there; oi 'ev 'er. It's lucky for you, young woman, we was so near. Maybe your most intermit friends wouldn't 'a knowd yer after puttin' up here for a week or so. Jest give one stroke ahead, Bill. That's it. There ain't much life in her now; that t'other'n was ever so much spryer than this'n. How oncommon 'evy it do make 'em to be sure. On your face, my dear, accordin' to the regulations, with your 'ed a little low. All right, chaps, shove ahead; maybe we'll put a breath into her now."

The boat shot ahead, and its wake, stretching far and wide, glistened in the moonlight when the boat itself was hidden in the shadow of a moored barge, or was deftly steered among the low-lying piles near the water's edge. The boat was moored to a ring on the bridge steps, and while one man waited to watch over it, the others carried the woman to the road.

There they found a policeman, who had seen them coming, and had hailed a hansom cabman, who was quietly trundling home. It was Mr. Cornelius Pavey, and he was inclined to treat the hail with derision, but seeing the boatmen, and what they bore, he pulled up.

"Something desperate going on, my friends," said he; "I'm very sorry for it. It's not in the nature of Cornelius Pavey to desert people in desperate circumstances—except for their indoobitable benefit," he added. "Now, what's to be done?"

"Take this party to the hospital," said the policeman.

"Certainly, my friend; it'll make my cab in a mess, but that I must put up with in consideration of the desperate circumstances."

Mr. Pavey had by this time descended from his seat "to superintend the bestowal of the victim of uncontrollable passion," as he put it. He opened the doors, took out the cushion, and placed it on the top of the cab as deliberately as usual, and then turned to help the

men. But a single glance at the pale face of the woman, as they turned her round, seemed to change his temper utterly.

"Oh God! it's number five," he cried. "Upon my life it is."

Then, turning to the boatmen, he upbraided them for dallying, ordered them into the cab, flung both his coats after them, charged them to wrap her up, and, despite their protests that shirtsleeves were insufficient on such a night, he swung himself into his seat, let down the window, lashed his horse, and, as they flew along, continued shouting through his little trap, "Rub her chest! Rub her hands! Do something!" Then bang went the trap, the horse was lashed again, and the cabman held his rein with set teeth, reckless of everything but time, for time was life, and the life he hoped to save was peace of mind to him.

The door of the hospital was soon gained, and then, pulling the horse on its haunches, the cabman jumped from his seat, reins in hand, before the cab had fairly stopped. Then, taking the girl from the men's knees, he rushed

into the hospital with his coats still wrapped around her, but refused to give her up till he had laid her in a warm and fitting room, surrounded by silent women. The slow and painful process of restoration here went on, while Mr. Pavey waited in the porter's room drying his coats.

"How do they bring 'em to?" he asked.

"Principally hot blankets and artificial breathing."

"What, pump air into 'em?"

"No, sir; they wrap 'em up tight in a hot blanket and lay 'em flat on the face, and then roll 'em over first one side and then the other, so that the water comes out and the air goes in and out, without any effort on the patient's part."

"And they're doing that now with *her?*"

"No doubt," said the porter with pride. "And you see that by-and-by the patient gets so used to havin' air go in and come out that he takes to breathin' quite natural, let him be never so dead."

"Then they always come to?"

"No," said the porter solemnly, "because no amount of breathin' 'll ever make the 'art go if he ain't a mind so to do."

But by-and-by a message of hope came to the cabman. Life was thrusting its way with innumerable tinglings from his daughter's slowly beating heart throughout all the channels of her awakening frame, and, in time, the girl awoke to find herself the richer by a father. And as the cabman left her that night he whispered in her ear, "Carry, my gal, I went away for the good of the family, but, unfortunately, I've stayed too long. We'll begin again as soon as you're better."

The fourteenth day found Mr. Hubble without any reply from Brian Roylstone, beyond his original refusal to concede anything; and the fifteenth day found him in the presence of his client. Colonel Brandlebraine was pillowed on an invalid's chair, and when he had heard the lawyer's statement, he summoned up his strength and said, without a moment's hesitation, "Then go on, Hubble; go on; spare no expense; only let her be free; make us

paupers if necessary, but let her be rid of him."

"Very good; I'll get to work at once, and, not to try your strength too much, I'll take my leave if *you* please."

"Thank'ee; I'm afraid I shan't see her free now; I'm afraid I shan't. The law's so slow. I wish the law was in my hand," cried the broken man lifting a trembling arm, "and my hand had strength; I'd hang him; I'd hang him in Leicester Square, in chains, and I'd let him rot! Good bye, Hubble; thank'ee."

But though the law was slow, it was sure and potent. The dying man watched it as it worked his will, but the watching stole away his strength. Each rebuff fell on him as an actual blow; each long delay was food for his disease; so he grew weaker as hope grew stronger; and when the end had come and Margaret told him she was free, he simply breathed "Thank God!" and fell into a quiet sleep; and when he awoke he said again "Thank God!" and "Margaret is free!" Thus, as his life ebbed away, he still kept

thanking God that his dear girl was free; and in due time Margaret mourned her father, and wept again to think she was alone.

Thus, before a tithe of the reckoning was paid, another and another wrong was added to the roll.

CHAPTER X.

HARRY BECOMES COMMERCIAL.

THE great idea which Archibald Roylstone conceived in full view of the moon was in due time given to the world. Having a reputation for genius to sustain, Mr. Roylstone, of course, never stooped to details; he simply threw out the idea; and, as already recorded, Mr. Wigriff, having no reputation for genius in the conventional sense, but being an eminently practical man, caught it. Proceeding by the commonest rules of life, he dressed the idea in the fashion of the day, took it into the City, and showed it about. It chanced that, in following the fashion of the day, Mr. Wigriff moulded the idea, great as it was, to the form of a Joint Ruination Company; its dress was the prospectus, whose virgin charms had led

Mr. Guffey captive, and sent him forth from Amphigorian Villa in the full belief that Stephenson was "a born fool to Roylstone," and that the days of railways were numbered. But Mr. Guffey proved to be but the prototype of many whose purse was bigger than their brains, and whose greed was bigger than both. When Mr. Wigriff's net was taken into the City and trawled about, the public flocked around it, and, unrestrained by anything like judgment, walked into it with golden anticipations, and thought themselves very lucky. It is true that certain uncommonly knowing persons put their fingers on what they were pleased to call a weak place in the scheme, and wanted to see the spheres go, or at least to know the manner of their going, before they invested for themselves or clients; but others, equally, if not more knowing, speculated largely, and inquired of an applauding public whether it was likely the spheres could be set going without money, and whether the directors would be worthy of their position if they told too much of an invention which it

was deemed imprudent to patent. And when these knowing ones pointed to the list of directors, and, expatiating on their social position, lauded them as men of honour, which, without evidence to the contrary, nobody doubted, and as men of business, which, from want of experience, nobody could deny, the excited public rushed on, fierce in its greed, So the epidemic spread, and so the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company took root and flourished.

Things having arrived at this satisfactory stage, Mr. Wigriff summoned a board meeting, and wrote to Mr. Guffey as follows:—

"My dear Sir,—I am peculiarly happy in being able to state that I am now in a position to place your young friend Mr. Wade in an eligible position, where he will be treated with a considerate courtesy as your *protégé*, and whence, by the simple exhibition of an industrious perseverance, he may rise to any position in the mercantile world to which his ambition may lead him to aspire.

"Let your young friend Mr. Wade then

meet me at No. 41, New Bridge Street, Blackfriars, to-morrow morning at ten o'clock; apprise him, my dear sir, that the house is at present 'to be let,' but will, in all probability, be the scene of our future labours in carrying out the greatest scheme ever originated; and impress upon him, above all things, that punctuality is not only the soul of business, but constitutes the very essence of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company.

"Believe me, my dear sir,

"Your obliged servant,

"ABEL VIOLET WIGRIFF."

Mr. Guffey had by this time become quite tired of an amanuensis. His thoughts took such an uncommonly long time to gather, that Harry reminded him of the figurative horse continually engaged in eating his head off in the stable; and then he likened himself to a horse subjected to a constant source of irritation from a most offensive spur invented by himself. He accordingly hailed Mr. Wigriff's letter with delight; and as he handed it to Harry he thought to himself he would prefer

Harry's companionship as a friend in the future to his presence as an artificial conscience in the past.

Harry stopped short at the opening sentence of the great man's letter, and, quoting the words "your young friend Mr. Wade," asked how that could refer to him.

"Oh, ha," said Mr. Guffey chuckling, "that's a capital idea of Wigriff's; you know it wouldn't do for a student-at-law to be a clerk, so he proposed that you should have one name for commerce and another for law; and he said he'd take care never to know you as anything but Mr. Wade. Wasn't it good of him, eh?" cried Mr. Guffey, as pleased with Mr. Wigriff's generosity as with his inventive genius.

Harry echoed these praises but feebly; he had begun to set up some pretensions to dignity, and the assumption of an *alias* did not comport therewith; it was humbling; it showed him how dependent he was, how insecure his footing in the world, how very poor his present vantage ground that he had thought so much

of only the day before. Nevertheless, for Mr. Guffey's sake, and because he was humbled, he said he was glad; and reading the letter, he marked its pompous style, and took pleasure in imagining how cleverly he would answer to the writer's prejudices, and thus rise in his favour. The satisfaction which these thoughts engendered caused him to treat the proposition to change his name with less aversion, and in five minutes he had come to regard it entirely from Mr. Guffey's point of view; such a suggestion was surely evidence of nothing but his patron's generosity. Then, remembering Mr. Wigriff was a man of law, he thought of the professional maxim that the staunch support of one solicitor is sufficient to start a barrister in life; so he went on dreaming until prosperity seemed only a stride ahead.

In the evening Harry unfolded these newly-kindled hopes to Julian Leep, as they sat in the close little room behind the tunnel of books; and when he had dwelt on them till he was tired, the old man said, with a voice

not altogether firm, "Now, Harry, my boy, shall I break your fall?"

Harry looked up half ashamed, as he always did when he feared the old man differed from him, and Julian continued, "You've shaped your course with marvellous dexterity; you've read all the finger-posts after your own fashion, as if every one of them pointed precisely the way you want to go; you've clothed the merest skeletons of hope with flesh and blood, and made them veritable prophets of good; but, by all that's ever come to pass in this deceptive world, you're wrong."

"Oh, what a one you are!" sighed Harry; and the bookseller answered, "Why, how as the world goes round can you hope to reach a haven of bliss at your time of life, my boy? How is it that you, of all persons in the world, can hope to have everything about you rose-colour?"

"But I don't hope it!"

"Then I am glad! for no man ever yet looked forward to a change but what he hoped prodigiously, and none such ever lived through

the change but what he found his hopes belied; so the wise man never looks forward to a change, however charming in its promises, without remembering he is bound to come across a plentiful stock of disagreeables, and that the devil will be always waiting round the corner with a tray of bran-new temptations admirably suited to his new circumstances. Ha, ha, you prodigal of hope!" cried the old man, slapping Harry on the back, "shall we look over your possible stock of disagreeables? shall we take the edge off your disappointments? shall we break your fall, in fact?"

"As you will," said Harry, with an ill-conditioned laugh; "I suppose you're right, and it seems reasonable."

Then, having made this admission, he challenged Julian to find cause for fearing disagreeables in connection with that estimable old gentleman Mr. Wigriff. Julian saw plenty; Mr. Wigriff would be full of crotchets, and the hardest of men to please in a month; but he would not be the only man that Harry would meet in his new occupation, or the author of

all the petty troubles to come. Harry asked for possible instances; but Julian answered, "What's the use, my confiding young friend? I'm not a prophet, and how is it to be supposed that I should hit upon the precise description of disagreeable that you are likely to come across. But I'll tell you what, there's your charming conception of a false name; how many thousand ills will that bring with it?"

"How many should it?"

"When a man walks through the earth with a lie in his mouth, how many times will that lie be thrown in his face in time to come?"

"That's mighty strong doctrine," said Harry; and the old man answered sharply, "Just as strong as truth."

This ended the controversy, but Harry was still as hopeful as youth itself. He rose on the morrow full of spirits, and with a light heart went forth to meet Mr. Wigriff. Punctually to the minute, he walked from Fleet Street as Mr. Wigriff drove from Blackfriars Bridge.

"Mr. Wigriff, I presume," said Harry, raising his hat as the great man alighted.

"The same sir, the same; and whom has he the pleasure of addressing?" asked the man of commerce loftily.

"Mr. Wade," answered Harry.

"Ay, ay!" said Mr. Wigriff relaxing; then you bear a missive from our mutual friend Mr. Guffey?"

"I am the bearer of a letter from you to him, which he said would serve every purpose."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the great man, "how refreshing is the simplicity of our friend; how charming in comparison with the craft and subtlety of the commercial world. But unfortunately, my young friend, it is a pattern we cannot afford to follow," added Mr. Wigriff with a profound shake of the head. "No, we must be equal to the times, or we shall be caught tripping."

Harry bowed as this highly edifying discourse was cut short by the opening of the door, and Mr. Wigriff entered to inspect the first floor.

Harry followed, and after a cursory look at the three smaller rooms in the rear, the housekeeper left them in a large apartment, where Mr. Wigriff proceeded in imagination to hold a board meeting. "With a nice large bookcase there, Mr. Wade, having folding doors glazed, and curtained with green silk, a couple of dozen of handsome leather chairs and a large leather-topped table, with a side table or two and a rich Turkey carpet of course, why this room will be furnished to inspiration, Mr. Wade; our court of direction will assuredly be inspired in such an apartment with such furniture; and we will make the world wonder with the swiftness of our movements, and the magnitude of our operations."

Harry always reverenced an orator, and as this was mouthed with every affectation of speech and action, he bowed submission as the great man continued, "Now, Mr. Wade, let me tell you what I want of you. I want you to fill a position of trust; a position which I should desire for my son, if I had one. I want you to be here in this office from ten o'clock

until five, only from ten to five, Mr. Wade, to represent me—me, I say,—when I am not here. We shall have something to do of course. This will be no sinecure; this company will be great in its operations; this office will introduce you into the full arena of the mercantile world. We shall have correspondence and books and papers in plenty, to conduct, to keep, to arrange. The correspondence and money matters I shall in a great measure leave to you, the books and accounts I shall leave in the hands of a clerk of inferior capacity." Harry bowed again this time with unqualified pleasure. "Your salary, Mr. Wade, shall be two hundred pounds per an-niu-um; two hundred pounds," repeated Mr. Wigriff, impressively, and Harry was almost afraid he should betray his appreciation of the largeness of the sum.

"Now, Mr. Wade, will you accept that appointment, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors?"

"Yes, sir, thank you," said Harry; "and I presume I am not to consider myself engaged until I hear further?"

Mr. Wigriff smiled a patronizing smile as he exclaimed, "Oh! the eagerness, the impetuosity of youth! Well, my young friend, you may consider your engagement morally certain, though not legally, for I have no doubt your appointment will be ratified at the Court of Directors to be held this afternoon. You shall hear from me to-morrow; but I should like to impress one thing upon you now, above all others, for fear I should not have another opportunity. It is absolutely necessary, in my opinion, to the due discharge of business duties that private affairs should be altogether dismissed from among us. So, Mr. Wade, I trust you will exercise complete caution in all your dealings with those persons whom you may meet in the discharge of your office here. You will meet with directors, you may see my private clerk, and many others, and I desire that you will keep them all at a distance from you; that you will see no more of them, one and all, than strict business requires. As for the directors, answer their questions, if they are proper questions; if improper, profess an inability to reply

until you have consulted me, and under no circumstances volunteer any information either public or private. As for the clerks, either those it may be necessary to place in this office, or my private clerk, a garrulous old man named Leep, Mr. Wade, deal with them strictly on business matters; permit no confidence on their part, and indulge in none yourself. This is my advice; it may be gratuitous, but I tender it to you as the result of long and dearly bought experience, admirably adapted to suit your circumstances. If I were a young man just starting in life," pursued this excellent man, "the motto which I should engrave upon my scutcheon would be, 'Never say more than you are obliged.'"

CHAPTER XI.

CERTAIN GENTLEMEN MAKE A PLEASURE OF BUSINESS.

WHILE the temporary offices of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company remained at No. 4, Serjeants' Inn, the meetings of its board were held at Radley's Hotel, because No. 4, Serjeants' Inn was unable to afford a cold collation, a necessary preface to the transactions of business in the eyes of directors with properly regulated minds. Accordingly the Directors of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company entered Radley's Hotel at about three o'clock in the afternoon; and as they were shown into the room usually set apart for their refections and consultations, they took their seats at the almost festive board and discussed politics and the state of the crops, until the

arrival of Mr. Wigriff with his books and papers in a blue bag, carried behind him by a couple of waiters. Immediately after he had taken his seat, the whole of the board fell to work on turtle and punch, under the able direction of the chairman, the Earl Mendroight, a kindly nobleman whose perennial smile chimed with his curling black locks, just tinged with grey, and robbed his high, black satin stock of all its formal terrors. Lord Mendroight was an ardent lover of science, and a profound believer in everything. He had often declared that Mr. Roylstone's discovery was the realization of one of his fondest dreams, and he embraced it rapturously. On the chairman's right sat Mr. Wigriff, complacency itself, and on his left Mr. Carter-Striver, who was closely pressed by my Lord Berrypurt. This youthful peer thought he had a turn for business, and believed he could have made a fortune if he had not been born to an estate and a peerage, so he made up for the disappointment by a little amateur practice, and accordingly inclined much to Mr. Carter-Striver's society, in the

belief that he was an efficient tutor in the mysteries of mercantile proceedings, and joined the direction of a joint ruination company with especial satisfaction, as it appeased his thirst for the excitement of trade without derogating from his social standing. Personally, Lord Berrypurt was a tall young man of fair complexion and harmless disposition. Mr. Wigriff was supported by the great inventor, and next him was the Rev. Chawton Hockley, a ponderous clergyman, who had a passion for boards, stood sponsor to five insurance companies, a local savings-bank, a burial society, a river steamboat company, and a cemetery company. It was commonly reported that he was such a capital man of business, that he got all his clerical work done for a mere song, and made quite a fortune out of board fees. The rest of the directors fought for room at the bottom of the table. Mr. Guffey whose appetite seemed to be of the most voracious character, elbowed Mr. Matthew Spendrill and Mr. John Cribb. Mr. Spendrill, a limp young man, who had never been seen out-of-doors without an over-

coat and an umbrella, had succeeded to a flourishing City business, but finding himself incapable of managing it, had handed it over to a company, in order that he might devote the whole of his energies to the destruction of other people's. Mr. Spendrill's case very much resembled my Lord Berrypurt's, except that he had been born to commerce and would have preferred a peerage. Mr. Cribb was a professional promoter of companies, who had a seat on all Mr. Wigriff's boards, and Mr. Wigriff returned the compliment as occasion arose. The arrangement worked extremely well, it always ensured a quorum, and often turned the scale when much needed. Mr. Cribb, however, was not a nice man, and his manners did not tend much to foster Lord Berrypurt's hankering after business connections; his education had most probably been neglected, his manners were certainly not refined, and his antecedents were decidedly mysterious. He was accompanied by Mr. Marcus Blight, his most obliging friend, and the director of many companies, whose slowness of apprehension was

no bar to his usefulness, for Mr. Cribb was always near to prompt him, and he accordingly never failed to vote the right way.

The waiters were kept well employed, and the wine flowed in quite a business-like fashion, so in a short time the whole board was in the very best state for business, and each director followed the bent of his humour as the waiters removed the cloth and furnished the board with ruby claret and fine old port. The chairman smiled, Mr. Roylstone looked extremely solemn, Mr. Carter-Striver became argumentative, and Lord Berrypurt weighed his arguments, Mr. Hockley sighed and picked his teeth, Mr. Spendrill yawned, and Mr. Blight fairly went to sleep. Mr. Cribb kept his eye on the managing director, and the great man having instructed the noble earl to call on him, rose to speak. On this Mr. Cribb awakened his particular friend, and everybody filled his glass.

"Our noble friend," said Mr. Wigriff, "has called upon me to propose a toast—the health of our shareholders, gentlemen." ("'Ear, 'ear,"

said Mr. Cribb.) "Gentlemen, let it not be thought for a moment that I under-estimate the inexhaustible power inherent in the discovery our honoured friend has made" (Mr. Roylstone bowed) "when I say that the circumstances of the time render shareholders an absolutely necessary part of the system which shall give this great discovery to the world, that it may be a means of profit to the inventor and of inexhaustible wealth to the nation. Shareholders, gentlemen, we are particularly reminded on this occasion, when we are about to inaugurate our active life, resemble that patient beast of burden the mule, which is content to bear the traveller and his baggage up the steepest hill and by the most rugged path; and when the journey's end has been attained, he is content to browse upon the hillside while he whom he has carried partakes of the fat of the land and reposes on down." ("Under down," whispered Lord Berrypurt, who rather prided himself on accuracy.) "They are like the bee, too," pursued the manager, "who spares some of his hard-earned

honey for the better execution of the onerous duties of the housewife. Gentlemen, the shareholder is an humble, confiding, patient creature, as long enduring as the mule, as industrious as the bee. To his confiding nature, his patience, long suffering, and industry we owe the mighty results that Joint Ruination Schemes have given to the world. Let us then, gentlemen, before proceeding to business, drink the health of the shareholders, with the hope that they may not be wanting in patience the whiles we bring to a glorious conclusion the great undertaking which without doubt is destined to renew the face of the world."

Everybody cheered this pretty sentiment, including Mr. Blight, and everybody drank with special relish, as everybody does when the wine is supplied by the toasted.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Wigriff, opening his minute book, "I have one or two matters of detail to intrude upon your attention."

Lord Berrypurt made a memorandum and

Mr. Spendrill began sketching himself in Lord Berrypurt's clothes, Mr. Hockley continued picking his teeth, and Mr. Blight again composed himself to sleep. Mr. Roylstone and Mr. Cribb seemed to be the only directors at all concerned in what the manager was about to propose.

Having sipped a little wine, Mr. Wigriff described the offices at No. 41, and proposed that they should be taken at once, so that the board should assemble there at its next meeting.

"I know them offices," said Mr. Cribb, "they're fust-rate, with a capital good entrance, and quite respectable. They ain't too far off th' West End, nor yet too far off th' City. In fact, in my opinion, they're just the ticket."

While the board discussed this weighty proposition with a determination to consult the interests of the shareholders, but exhibiting a disposition to flounder impotently withal, Mr. Wigriff whispered Mr. Guffey that he had seen Harry and was about to propose that he be engaged; he assured Mr. Guffey there was

no necessity for him to certify to the young man's competence, he would take the entire responsibility,—indeed he as good as desired Mr. Guffey to hold his tongue; and Mr. Guffey, having no wish to hamper Mr. Wigriff in carrying out his benevolent design, consented at once.

In the meantime Lord Berrypurt had discovered the offices it was proposed to take were no further off than across the road, and being extremely anxious to exercise his talent for business, he proposed the board should go over in a body to view them. This proposition, however, was by no means approved by Mr. Hockley, and as the majority of the board, including Mr. Carter-Striver and the chairman, decidedly preferred remaining in a comfortable room after luncheon to a promenade in Bridge Street, the suggestion was set aside, and Mr. Wigriff was empowered to take the offices without further consultation.

It followed as a matter of course that when the offices were taken, it would be necessary that a representative of the Company should

be permanently stationed there from ten to five; and when each member of the board, including Mr. Blight, who was awakened for the purpose, had expressed his unbounded thanks to Mr. Wigriff for condescending to take five hundred pounds a year as managing director and secretary *pro tem.*, the man of commerce showed by an ingenious argument that the appointment of a youth as clerk or assistant secretary would save the Company the entire expense of a secretary and a whole office of bookkeepers. Having by some means become impressed with the belief that a managing director at a salary of £500 a year was absolutely necessary to the carrying on of a company, the directors readily fell in with this apparently economical proposal, and Harry's engagement was unanimously ratified under the impression that the Company was thereby saved at least £300 a year.

"This Mr. Wade," said Mr. Wigriff as he recorded the board's conclusion, "you will find to be a gentlemanly young man of good address, tolerably well educated, and possessing many

qualifications not usually met with in one of his station, which will prove of essential service in the conduct of our affairs."

Mr. Guffey could not resist the temptation to endorse this statement with an emphatic "Hear, hear," and Mr. Blight, wholly of his own accord, indulged in a similar manifestation of approval.

The next subject for discussion was of far greater importance, and was entered into with something approaching fervour by Mr. Royl-stone, who had taken little part in the smaller matters which had engaged the board's attention. This all-important subject was the proposed purchase of a piece of land for a manufactory and a temporary terminus. The piece of land it was proposed to secure lay in the Erith marshes, a safe distance from the powder magazines, but not quite a safe distance from the river in the estimation of some members of the board, who thought there would be danger of the spheres falling at times into the water with all the passengers. This fear was not shared by Mr. Roylstone, who had confi-

dence in his gigantic loadstones; he was supported by Mr. Wigriff and Mr. Cribb, who privately based their conclusion upon the principle that a thing must go up before it can come down. Mr. Carter-Striver observed that he felt inclined to hesitate before pronouncing an opinion in opposition to such weighty authority, and the two peers, who had been troubled with a severe attack of indecision, readily caught at this view of the case, and shook their heads profoundly as they endorsed it; whereupon Mr. Guffey said, "To be sure," Mr. Blight added "Of course," and the rest of the board severally assented, without having a very clear notion as to the nature of the subject under discussion.

But when it was all settled, Lord Berrypurt, unwilling to lose an opportunity of showing he was capable of making a suggestion, timidly inquired of Mr. Roylstone whether he could not dispense with land altogether, and thus save rent, by suspending his workshops and everything else in mid air. Mr. Roylstone said it was quite possible, but doubted whether

it would be wise; and after entering into an elaborate argument to show that the power of suspension would be costly if protracted, he concluded by saying that twelfthly and lastly it would be impossible for people to enter either the spheres or the workshops unless they occasionally came to earth, so for those occasions at least it was necessary to provide accommodation.

This disposed of, Mr. Wigriff was authorized to advertise for tenders for the construction of the copper shell of a sphere which it was intended should be afterwards completed internally under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Roylstone himself. Mr. Wigriff and Mr. Roylstone were appointed to draw up the specifications, and the tenders themselves were to be opened at the next board meeting. All this was regarded as an affair of great moment, and when it had been solemnly disposed of, the board adjourned with that feeling of unalloyed satisfaction which the consciousness of having done one's duty always induces.

CHAPTER XII.

COLONEL WILLWEND IS CIRCUMVENTED BY STRATEGY.

THE house in Adelphi Terrace continued to wear its accustomed appearance, and as it discovered no sign of being inhabited by ordinary mortals, people wondered why it was never let. But those who chose to think about the matter were very few, and even they ceased to be curious after a time, and the house was by common report put into Chancery in company with two others on Snow Hill and a like number in Stamford Street, Blackfriars, the property of a single old lady of eccentric habits and unparalleled obstinacy. But the arrangements of the Colonel's house had nevertheless been subjected to change; Mrs. Pavey, a trusted domestic of the Colonel's in former

times, made her appearance one day and solicited employment. She backed her application with a doleful account of her misfortunes; her husband had disappeared, and during her own lengthy residence in a hospital her children, to the number of fifteen, had been dispersed abroad,—some by entering on domestic and other service, others by admission to philanthropic institutions, and the balance of four had been cared for by the Union; after having been given up for dead on three separate occasions she was dismissed the hospital, bought a mangle, and recovered her four children from the workhouse, namely, Arthur Wellesley, Howard Montgomery, Cecilia, and Beatrice. Her eldest born was in employment somewhere, but she had entirely lost sight of him; the same might be said of one or two of her younger boys, including Napoleon, whom she highly esteemed, and as domestic service was not what it was in former days, but was nothing but continual gadding about from place to place, she did not in the least hope to discover the whereabouts of her elder daugh-

ters for a long time to come, and proposed to content herself for the present by tending the wants of Arthur Wellesley, Howard Montgomery, Beatrice, and Cecilia. Her story was eminently calculated to touch Mabel, who persuaded her grandfather to allow Mrs. Pavey first to do "a little cleaning" now and then, and afterwards to attend regularly every day, from seven in the morning until noon, to cook and clean as occasion required. Mrs. Pavey was a thin little woman with no body at all to speak of, made to appear still less by her scanty clothing, but she had a very large head, and usually wore an ample black straw bonnet. She was about five-and-forty, had a large nose, a straight mouth which closed firmly, and a watery eye, which induced a habit of snuffling. She accounted herself a confidential servant to Colonel Willwend, and presuming upon this and the fact that she had nursed Miss Mabel when she was only a month or two old, she was not slow to advise her young mistress, and accordingly prompted her to many reforms, including the appropriation and furnishing of

a small room for her own use, in addition to her little bedroom on the floor above it. The curious public observed the growing gaiety of the window of this room, and having complete faith in the current rumour, concluded that Mrs. Pavey was the elderly maiden lady of eccentric habits, and a report got abroad that it was her custom to spend a particular portion of each day in each of her law-ridden houses; the indisputable fact that Mrs. Pavey's visit to Adelphi Terrace ended with twelve o'clock gave colour to the story, and was treated as proof positive of the whole.

It happened at a time when this superstition was losing special interest purely from age that Mrs. Pavey was watched from Adelphi Terrace by a lady in mourning, and perseveringly dogged to her home in Cook's Court. If Mrs. Pavey had been aware of her reputation, as representing in her single person the whole of a popular street legend, she would naturally have been suspicious of an inquisitive public and expectant of the lady in mourning, but ignorance of her notoriety, coupled with a

contented mind and a distinct purpose, made her indifferent to everything but the attainment of her three-pair back in Cook's Court and the succouring, if need be, of Arthur Wellesley, Howard Montgomery, Cecilia, and Beatrice. But as a matter of fact, the lady in mourning was in nowise curious respecting the popular legend, nor was she in any way the representative of the too imaginative public. Taking a mental note of the house in Cook's Court into which Mrs. Pavey disappeared, the lady returned into the Strand, and there waited three minutes by the clock of St. Mary-le-Strand. She then went back to the house in Cook's Court, and having inquired without the least hesitation for Mrs. Pavey by name, she was escorted by a meagre child of six, who turned out to be no other than Arthur Wellesley Pavey, into Mrs. Pavey's presence. The lady in mourning then raised her veil, and Mrs. Pavey, lifting up her hands in astonishment, exclaimed, "Lawks a me, if it ain't Miss Margaret!"

Thereupon the little woman escorted her

visitor to a seat of honour, and straightway commenced recounting her troubles, the whole of which she traced without exception to the conduct of Corney, to whom she gave no credit whatever for holding on slack, though it must be admitted in excuse for her rancour that she was perfectly ignorant of his motives. Having done with this matter, she introduced Arthur Wellesley, Cecilia, and Beatrice, and begged Miss Margaret would excuse the absence of Howard Montgomery, aged nine, on the ground that he was at work in a neighbouring manufactory, folding envelopes at a penny farthing a thousand. These matters having been duly disposed of, Mrs. Pavey noticed Margaret's mourning, and exclaimed,

"Now don't say it's the Colonel, miss, don't!"

But Margaret was obliged to disclose that she mourned her father, and she might have told Mrs. Pavey a very long story about her own wrongs, but she of course refrained, and as soon as possible inquired of Mrs. Pavey touching Colonel Willwend.

"Ah, poor dear gentleman!" cried Mrs. Pavey, "he goes on just the same as ever with his pretendings, and such a fine gentleman as he was, miss, in the old time to be sure."

As Margaret knew very little of Colonel Willwend's vagaries, Mrs. Pavey took advantage of the opportunity elaborately to describe them with considerable exaggeration. "Orfern and orfern, miss, if you'd believe me," said she, "he's been known to go stampin' about his room the whole precious night, a-chargin' of the chairs and tables with a drawn sword, and nothing on but his shirt and jack boots; and onst we found him a-laying on his back a-calling for water and a-swearin' awful he was wounded, and nothing would persuade him to get up, and we had to roll him on a bed on the floor, not bein' able to lift him, and cover him up, and when he'd 'ad a sleep he came to as comfortable as if nothing at all had happened."

Mrs. Pavey next gave an account of Mabel's attention to her grandfather's wants, in the course of which she quite exhausted her

vocabulary of admiration, and wound up by deploring the loss of Harry, whose memory as a baby in long clothes she cherished among her fondest recollections. But the point on which Mrs. Pavey was most talkative was Mabel's non-introduction to society.

"Why she might as well be a nun at once," exclaimed the little woman, "and a sister of mercy far better, for they do get about a bit, poor things, which Miss Mabel never do but once or twice a month to church, though they don't see much company, I believe, 'ceptin' what's to be got in the hospitals and the likes o' that."

Margaret suggested that this state of things could easily be mended by judicious management, and asked whether she could obtain an interview with either the Colonel or Mabel if she called. Margaret made this suggestion, thinking it would enable her easily to get more trustworthy information respecting Harry, at whose absence she appeared to be much concerned, and that she could be serving Mabel by the way.

Mrs. Pavey's delight at having secured Margaret's services in aid of her pet project was tempered only by her doubts as to their ability to circumvent so wary a commander as the Colonel. But after much discussion the two conspirators devised a scheme which they resolved to put into execution at once, and it was agreed between them that Mrs. Pavey should if possible prepare the way the very next morning, and consult with Margaret with a view to future operations in the afternoon.

It chanced that fortune favoured them, for on the next day Mabel was engaged during a portion of the morning in the kitchen making a meat pie. Accordingly Mrs. Pavey suddenly remembered that it was about time her pots and pans were brightened up, and commenced at once on a copper saucepan, with the evident intention, Mabel thought, of carrying on a brisk conversation, and she was not mistaken.

"How brickdust do vary, miss!" said the little woman; "sometimes it's all as crumbly as that flour you're a-mixing, but at other

times it's all full o' cinders like, and scratches your coppers dreadful."

"So does flour vary, Mrs. Pavey," said Mabel.

"Yes it do; sometimes you gets the bottom of the sack, and then it's all full of chips and bits of tow, and tastes horrible. But the most variablest thing that I know of is stoves, some of 'em do take the blacklead so much better than others."

"And some draw so much better than others," put in Mabel.

"So they does," responded the little woman; "but I know of somethink even more variabler than stoves, Miss Mabel."

"And what is that, Mrs. Pavey?"

"Well, really now," said the little woman, with an admiring look at a highly polished fish-kettle she had placed under the dresser, "I really think you ought to guess."

"The weather, then?" guessed Mabel.

"Well, that do vary very much, but it's not the most variablest of all," said Mrs. Pavey, commencing on a stewpan.

"But how can I guess?" pleaded Mabel. "Everything varies."

"Everythink does, as you say, my dear, but this what I'm speaking of varies as much more than stoves as stoves varies more than the weather. Really they does."

"Then I must give it up."

"Why young ladies is the most variablest of everythink." And, as if to deliver herself with more emphasis, the little woman stopped rubbing as she elaborated her meaning. Some young ladies, she assured Mabel, had no knowledge "of anythink but the 'complishments;" and if they could even bring themselves to make a meat pie, such as Mabel was engaged on, they would assuredly fail to adorn it with "crimping, and the likes of that, and as for making the two holes in the top, they'd never dream of such a thing, unless they was told." Having delivered herself of these sentiments, Mrs. Pavey dipped her leather in the brick-dust, and commenced afresh on the stewpan; but she presently renewed the subject with, "Not but what I should say, Miss Mabel,

that you're not doing yourself justice in neglecting the 'complishments."

Mabel pleaded in excuse that her grandfather needed all her time, and, even if he did not, she could scarcely hope to mend matters, since she was without friends to guide her.

"Friends, my dear," Mrs. Pavey dogmatized, "are very easy got by young ladies in your persition, and you oughtn't to be another day without your governess and your acquaintances, and your little parties and the likes of that; and the Colonel, I'm sure, would let you if you was to ask him."

"Oh no," said Mabel, "I couldn't ask him; he'd be loth to deny me, and yet I know how anything unusual, such as my leaving the house for ever so short a time, would distress him."

Mrs. Pavey suggested that Mabel could, at least, have some one in her own room "to teach her the 'complishments." Mabel, on the contrary, assured her that the presence of a stranger in the house would be equally distressing to her grandfather as her own absence;

and, although Mrs. Pavey proceeded to urge many weighty considerations in support of her advice, and to suggest many plausible schemes for carrying it out, Mabel refused to listen to any proposition likely in the least to embarrass her grandfather. Indeed, the moment this subject was touched upon, her wonted cheerfulness gave place to the deepest concern; the temptation to minister to her own advantage at the expense of her grandfather's ease seemed to fill her with alarm; and her loyalty was such, that the mere suggestion so moved her that she appeared at times to be positively distressed.

At length, when she found Mrs. Pavey's argument was becoming too strong for her, she cried, "You must not ask me, Mrs. Pavey, to do anything which will, in the least, disturb grandfather. You know how much he needs all my attention, and I'm resolved to give it all, cost what it may. There!"

"But you must admit, my dear," pleaded the little woman, with an insinuating sniff, "that you'd like a young lady or two for com-

pany, and nobody can say there's harm in that; but, even if you didn't, it ain't to be denied that things can't go on for ever like this; and, if you're left by yourself, which I don't see but what you must be in a year or two, without wishing to be unfeeling or pretending to be wanting in respect, how are you to manage without any friends but what's beneath you, though them you 'as 'as ever proved theirselves faithful, and, please God, ever will unto their dying day?"

Here Mrs. Pavey let fall a tear, and though it lighted just beside the handle of the stewpan, and threatened to blur the shining result of her labours, she paid no attention to it, and only sought to hide her emotion by a protracted snuffle and a feigned cough.

As for Mabel, she knew right well that she could do no more nor less than admit the burning desire of her heart for something to relieve her days' monotony, but, as she had borne it in secret heretofore, so she resolved to bear it still, whether the future was brightened by thoughts of love, which

formed so large a portion of her waking dreams, or by the lesser charms of life which ever ministered to her hopes of brighter days; and if, as often happened when her wishes bent her thoughts this way, she was startled by the merest ghost of selfishness, which strove for life among them, she'd turn aside and put another figure in the group in which she had cast herself, and that would be of an old man, greyheaded, but erect, weaned from his fancies, and whimsical only in the method of his good deeds.

Mabel's opposition was not sufficient to induce Mrs. Pavey to relinquish her purpose; indeed, she became more determined to carry it out when she found that Mabel's self-denial was the chief obstacle in the way of Mabel's better fortune. Accordingly, Mrs. Pavey, after some further cogitation with her co-conspirator, resolved to act independently of her young mistress, and actually determined to attack the Colonel himself. So one morning, when the old man was busy drawing up a plan by which he hoped to secure utter anni-

hilation of the enemy and unqualified renown for himself, he was disturbed by Mrs. Pavey's small piping voice calling, with an interval of silence between each summons.

"Colonel Willwend! Sir! May I make so bold! A word with you, please, sir! Hi!"

The last exclamation confirmed the Colonel in the impression that some one was calling, and, issuing from his tent, he came upon Mrs. Pavey ready to depart, with her shawl tightly drawn round her, and a large door-key clasped in her left hand.

"If you please, sir," said she, in a loud whisper, immediately the Colonel made his appearance, "Miss Mabel's in her own room, and doesn't know I've made so bold as to pay my respects to you, sir, which it'd be better if she wasn't informed; but, being the mother of fifteen children, which eleven of 'em, as I don't know to the contrary, keeps theirselves entire, and the rest does their best, I thought it only dootiful in me, sir, having been so long in the family, for five-and-twenty year come Christmas, to make so bold, when it's been on my mind these two years and more."

"Very glad to see you, Mrs. Pavey; very glad," said the Colonel. "Hope you're well, and hope the boys are well."

"Nicely, thank you, sir; and the boys is getting on quite comfortable, thank God and Mr. Purkis, which Howard Montgomery was to have been a monitor, only he went a-foldin', and earns nine shillings a week and more; and I do assure you, sir, that Mr. Purkis is as good a teacher for getting people on as ever could be desired for Miss Mabel, exceptin' you preferred a governess as more becoming to her station, and the likes o' that."

"Mabel wants some one, does she?" said the old man nursing his hands; "Mabel wants some one, Mrs. Pavey; I suppose she finds that books are not enough,—that books are hard to understand?"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I've made so bold as to come to you, sir, quite without Miss Mabel's knowing, which I think she'd be much put out if she knew, but, being the mother of a large family, and knowing what becomes a lady, I thought I was in dooty

bound to mention, sir, that she's nineteen next birthday, and don't seem to have no advisers like but you and me in all the world, sir, which is not as most young ladies is brought up, sir; so I thought you'd not take it unkind if I paid my respects to you, sir, with the observation that Miss Mabel haven't learnt the 'complishments."

"No, Mrs. Pavey, no; you're very good, very good to think of Mabel, very good to think of me. Mabel is quite well, Mrs. Pavey, eh, quite well?"

"She doesn't seem to want nothink, sir, beyond a little colour on her cheeks, which can't be expected in a town house."

"But what's to be done, Mrs. Pavey, what's to be done? I'm very old and very weak. It isn't well that her youth should be wholly spent in the shadow of my barren winter; but what's to be done, Mrs. Pavey? If she were to go away, and, by chance, to be lost to me, as Harry has been, what would become of her; and I,—I should die! What am I to do, Mrs. Pavey?"

This was very perplexing to the little woman, because it was part of her arrangement with her fellow-plotter that she should recommend nothing explicitly, and should, on no account, mention Margaret, whose appearance on the scene they desired should appear to be purely accidental. Mrs. Pavey's work was comprised in the task of bringing the Colonel, and, if possible, Mabel also, into a proper frame of mind to receive Margaret's visit. She was, accordingly, unprepared with any suggestion beyond that relating to Mr. Purkis, which she repeated with the same qualification as before.

"Thank you, Mrs. Pavey," the old man answered, "thank you; we must think of this. I'll think of it, and see what can be done."

"You never will regret it, sir, sure-ly; and I hope you'll quite remember that Miss Mabel's in her own room, and that I've come here quite unbeknown to her for the purpose of keeping it all secreted from her. I wish you a very good morning, sir."

With this the little woman disappeared, and the Colonel pondered over Mabel's needs, without giving one other thought to the enemy that day.

Early the next morning Mabel looked out from her little room, wondering what the world was like beyond the river and the high chimneys, and the morning mist that mantled the city as with a shroud; and she almost wept in her loneliness, for, despite the strength of her opposition to Mrs. Pavey, the little woman's words had their effect, and Mabel's heart was the wearier for them. But her thoughts were not alone of herself. Where was Harry in all the world, within or beyond that hazy canopy of mist? Had he any one to comfort him when troubled, or to bear a part in his rejoicing? Why was not she near to offer this comfort, or to take part in this rejoicing? How was it she could not tell whether he was with the living or the dead? What lions barred the way to him, what giants held him back? The strongest of lions and the mightiest of giants, both alike named blindness, most powerful to mislead.

"Mabel! Mabel! I say, Mabel!" she heard her grandfather call as she pondered, and when she opened the door she found him holding a lighted candle and a door-key.

"Come, Mabel, come," he said. "I want to show you, Mabel,—to show you some things you have never seen."

"Some things I have never seen, grandfather?"

"Yes, my dear, downstairs; and I want to talk to you,—I want to ask your opinion as to —er—to ask your opinion."

So, with Mabel following, he led the way to what was once the dining-room, but into which no one had gone for several years, save Mrs. Pavey, and she went no oftener than was necessary to keep the place from being entirely overrun by things of darkness. It was a large, old-fashioned room, having a rather musty smell, with a number of oak chairs ranged on one side of it, while several covered paintings hung on the walls. The darkness being broken only by the single candle, gave an air of solemnity to the place; indeed,

Mabel trembled as if she had been entering a tomb, but the Colonel presently pulled back one of the shutters and the room became commonplace, so that Mabel was only curious to know what her grandfather would show her, and surprised that he should have volunteered to enter upon this unusual expedition.

"All these paintings with their faces on the wall, my dear," said he, "are portraits,—portraits of our kinsmen or of our friends. I want you to see them,—to get interested in them; you may thus get to know them, and they may become your friends in thought, as they were mine in deed."

Then the Colonel sighed at the strangeness of his own thought,—he was almost conscious of the inaptness of his design; but, drawing the girl towards him, he stroked her hair and said, "I'm afraid, my dear, that my selfish care for you has done you harm; you are grown to be a woman, but have had no pleasure in your youth."

"Hush, hush," said Mabel, turning to him with a smile; "you are desponding again,

grandfather, and must desist, for I tell you I am very happy."

"To your praise, my dear,—to your praise, for the springtide of your days has been spent in gladdening the wintry way of an old man who's made you no return, but in his jealousy has robbed you of the love you would have gained,—the warm, strong love of youth. I have robbed you, Mabel, of the speedy profits which come from spending love on hearts yet young and unembittered by betrayal."

Mabel put on an appearance of cheerfulness as she replied, "Now, grandfather, put away these thoughts; come from this sombre room and be your old self. Come!" she said, pulling at his arm, but the old man stayed her, saying,

"No, Mabel, no! I want you to learn something of the world—something useful; but if I teach you," he added plaintively, "you will not leave me, Mabel,—you will not leave me utterly alone."

"How can you ask such a question?" she said imperatively, thinking to win him from sombre thoughts by feigning anger.

"Well, well, my dear, you're very good. Now let us uncover that picture beside the door there; you will be pleased with that."

It was a large picture, and when its clumsy covering of linen was removed, it proved to be a finished portrait of two young girls about Mabel's age.

"There," said the old man, "which of those think you is your mother,—which is my little Mary, which her friend Madge?"

Mabel fixed on the fair one for her mother, and the Colonel explained to her that the other was Madge Brandlebraine, whom he liked because she was Mary's friend and the child of his oldest companion, "but for no other reason," he added curtly. Then, in his absent way, he said, "She must be handsome now, and very proud; but she was with your mother when she died, and knows more of her than any other,—more even than I."

"Is she living now?" asked Mabel, with her eyes still intent upon the painting.

A sharp twinge, as if of pain, shot across the old man's face; then, answering with ill-

suppressed agitation, that he did not know, he turned abruptly to another picture and asked Mabel to help him uncover it. She complied, but her tongue continued busy with questions touching her mother and her mother's friend. The Colonel, however, gave her only indefinite, if not evasive answers, and, as soon as possible, he began speaking of the virtues of Colonel Brandlebraine, whose portrait they had in the meantime uncovered. He spoke with strong determination for a time as he covertly watched Mabel, but noticing that her eyes turned to the painting they had left, he stumbled in his speech, his words came unevenly, his thoughts seemed to wander, and at length he broke out beseechingly, "You will not leave me, Mabel?"

"No, no, grandfather. I have told you."

"Not even if Madge there is alive?"

"No. I tell you, no!"

"Tell me you will not seek her," he pleaded; and when she had complied, he relapsed into a more helpless mood, and, looking wistfully about, he cried, "Oh, how shall I please you,

how recompense you?" Then, bowing his head upon her shoulder, he wept, and Mabel, trembling with love and fear, answered as she raised him,

"Don't bother, grandfather; anything pleases me that makes you happy; and indeed these pictures are full of interest to me. Tell me of them."

"I'm afraid you've seen the only one that's really full of interest to you," he said plaintively; "they are all but as dry bones, and I am powerless to make them live to you as I had thought of doing."

"You need not make them live, grandfather; only show them to me and tell over their names,—that will be enough."

"No," he answered, "I think we'd better leave them; they're crowded with unwelcome memories that fill me with vain regrets, and I wouldn't leave you such a legacy as that."

Then Mabel went back to her old request, and pleaded with him to leave the room and have a chat on more congenial things. On

this he turned and said with a smile, "You seem always cheerful, my dear."

"Because I am," she answered.

"And have no regrets?"

"Except that I should like to see you more content."

"But have you no thought of yourself, no wishes yoked with hope, no longings that have outlived expectation, no bitter thoughts of my great selfishness? And do you not count up your loss and grieve over it as a bankrupt merchant mourns a foundered venture?"

"What do you speak of, grandfather?" asked Mabel, doubtful whether to humour him or not.

"Shall I tell her," he muttered to himself, "of the joys which come of mixing with companions of her own age? She can have no appetite for what she's never tasted, so why should I add to her wrongs the wastings of regret?"

Mabel saw his lips moving, and noticed that his eyes glanced nervously about, so she shook him by the arm and cried, "You are musing, grandfather. Awake!"

"Shall we talk then?" he asked, after a pause, and when she answered that she was willing to do just as he pleased, he said, "Then tell me, Mabel, what shall we do to make you fit to stand against the world when you have to stand alone?"

"Oh, don't talk of that, grandfather!" she cried, and throwing her arms round his neck, she pressed her full, fair cheek against his wrinkled face, and said, "I thought we'd done with sombre things. Come, now, be gay in earnest."

It was thus that Mrs. Pavey discovered them, as she entered gleefully and announced, "There's Miss Brandlebraine's come, and she's waitin' in the hall, which—begging your pardon, sir,—but it's an opportunity, a decided opportunity."

The Colonel listened dazedly, but Mabel exclaimed, "Why, that's the name of mother's friend! You *will* see her, grandfather?"

"It really is an opportunity, sir," put in Mrs. Pavey. "Shall I show the lady to your own room, miss?"

"Ah!" said the Colonel, much relieved. "Take her to your own room and leave me here."

Mabel waited for a moment in doubt whether her grandfather would repent giving her this permission, but the temptation to gain a friend who had been her mother's friend strove with her, and in the end prevailed, so that Mrs. Pavey had the incalculable pleasure of conducting Mabel to the presence of her visitor in the hall, and she did not fail to accompany her introduction with many mysterious nods and winks, designed to inspire Margaret with renewed zeal in Mabel's behalf. As soon as her little mistress and the visitor had passed beyond the range of her approving smile, Mrs. Pavey knocked at the dining-room door, and putting her head into the room observed, "They've gone upstairs, sir, and I do assure you, sir, it's an opportunity which you never will regret."

"She must not take Mabel away, Mrs. Pavey; see that she doesn't induce her to leave me," cried the Colonel appealingly.

"Lord bless you, sir, what can you be a-

thinking of?" exclaimed Mrs. Pavey, growing familiar; "which I hope Miss Margaret will be a-comin' orfen, and act as if she was a garjen true to my young missis."

"Well, well, I hope so," said the Colonel. And Mrs. Pavey left him with this poor effigy of hope wrestling in his heart against a thousand fears, each delighting in its torment, and aiming at its death.

It seemed that Mabel was to know nothing of the arrogance of Mistress Brian Roylstone, as with a sisterly embrace Margaret looked into the fair girl's eyes, and said in tones full of gentleness, "And this is little Mabel, grown almost a woman!"

Mabel cast down her eyes and said how glad she was in having found her mother's friend. And of all the thousand things that rose to her lips, she could only repeat that she was glad, and hoped that Margaret would also be a friend to her. Then they sat upon Mabel's little couch, and Margaret asked her to tell all she knew of Harry; when, where, and by whom he was last seen, and what efforts had been

made for his recovery. It was little that Mabel knew, and when she had told that little, Margaret found it could all be described as trust in Wigriff, whom she did not trust.

"Does your grandfather know more than you?" asked Margaret.

"I think not."

"Does he know more than Wigriff has told him?"

"I believe not; I feel sure not."

"Wigriff is not to be trusted," said Margaret curtly.

"I know it," was the equally curt response.

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I cannot *bear* him."

Margaret smiled at Mabel's emphasis, and then said, "I believe Wigriff knows of Harry's whereabouts, and keeps silence from reasons you are not aware of."

"But he has protested his ignorance over and over again, and each time with more earnestness and appearance of truth, and each time he has declared that he has searched everywhere for him."

"Have you not heard of deceivers?" asked Margaret almost sarcastically.

"But can a man be so base as to rob one of a brother and then say he is lost?"

"Ay, and worse!" cried Margaret, with a face full of anger, but she checked herself and said, "Now listen, Mabel, I'm resolved to find Harry."

"Will you really?" cried Mabel; "have you any hope?"

"I will tell you how much hope I have when I see you again. For the present you must keep this secret from both your grandfather and Wigriff. And watch Wigriff well for me, he has more reasons than you think of for keeping Harry away from us, but I have just as many for bringing him to light, besides my love for you."

Margaret sealed this declaration with a kiss, and silenced Mabel's thanks with another. Then she asked Mabel of herself, and questioning her in the light of Mrs. Pavey's information, she learned from her own lips the measure of her needs, which Mabel ever and anon declared

were scarce an hour old, and would all be met in double measure, heaped up and flowing over, if only Margaret would be her friend. And Margaret answered, lovingly enfolding Mabel in her arms:

"When your mother said 'good bye' to me and to all the world beside, she asked that I would cherish you and Harry with a mother's love. I promised, but wofully have I kept my pledge. I have a long story to tell you some day, Mabel, of your mother and my sweet companionship with her, and I must also tell how strangely I've been punished for my neglect of you and Harry when I make confession of my many sins. But now by all my broken vows, and all the brightest, fondest memories centred in your mother's name, I promise you to be your friend and close companion from this time; and since my father is dead and I am friendless now, I'll have no other friends but you and yours, so we'll go wandering through the world, wedded by our common object, seeking Harry hand in hand."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. WIGRIFF MAKES USE OF A DRAB FAMILY.

THE net which Mr. Wigriff trawled through the City with so much effect, was baited with promises of the highest possible dividend and the smallest possible risk. But as time wore on, those greedy ones who gorged the bait and tumbled helter-skelter into the net itself, remarked with growing fears that the chance of dividend decreased in proportion as the prospect of loss increased. And as the day approached when it was necessary that the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company should hold its general meeting, Mr. Wigriff became aware of the probability of a violent eruption; indeed, he never went to the office at No. 41 but he found numerous symptoms of its imminence. Disappointed shareholders

increased in number; some wrote to the office, others called, and every one of them demanded information which the authorities declared it was wholly out of the question to supply. Mr. Wigriff had, on sundry occasions, given Harry hints as to the treatment of a dissatisfied shareholder, which amounted generally to instructions to put a good face on the matter, and to accompany a declaration that the directors desired to impart every information, by explaining nothing with as many words and as much plausibility as he could master. The arguments which arose exercised Harry's powers of advocacy, but it is questionable whether they improved his morals.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Wigriff, like a careful physician, studied the symptoms of the case, and bethought him of treatment. He came to the conclusion that the patient above all things required a soothing draught, and, if possible, a counter-irritant. The nature of the soothing draught was soon determined; Mr. Wigriff resolved to declare a dividend. It was true the Company had not made any

profits, for the simple reason that it had not commenced business, but according to the most approved methods of joint ruination company management, this was no reason why a dividend should not be declared. Experienced financiers and economists might think otherwise, but Mr. Wigriff had to deal only with discontented shareholders, hungry for dividends. Pursuing his cogitations as he enjoyed the cool of a June evening, in the most grateful of all the arbours in the Amphigorian grounds, Mr. Wigriff decided that the dividend should be small, and accordingly fixed it at two per cent. The question as to the form of the counter-irritant was more difficult of solution, but Mr. Wigriff was so elated with the device of a two per cent. dividend, that he was content to postpone consideration of all other matters, and give himself up to rejoicing. And as he gloried in the brilliancy of his own wit, it chanced that his manly sister came to call him to the evening meal, so in the frolicsomeness of the moment, he appealed to her whether he, so like a common man, could be the great Wigriff.

"In this simple blouse," said he, "this jocund garden hat, smoking this unpretending cigarette, and surrounded by all the simplicity and beauty of nature, would any one believe this was the great speculator, the great arbiter of people's happiness, the monarch of investors? And would any one believe, my dear, that with this peace which reigns on all around, the Nemesis was near at hand? We eat, we drink, we sleep in peace, and may we so continue, for though the Nemesis is coming, my dear, she comes to meet her match; she may come in the form of a lion, my dear, but she will meet with Samson! She only looms in the distance as yet, but we will go forth to meet her like the Ker-ischean martyrs; we will entice her away from our lambs and our flocks, and we will destroy her in the gate."

While the man of commerce triumphed in anticipation over his natural enemies, the shareholders of his own creation, another was busy planning for the future, as he lightly wended his way from the heated City, and greeted the grateful breezes of the south. And

of all the thousand and one who, at this special time, calculated their chances and laughed with hope or sighed with disappointment, none were more honest in their intentions or sounder in their calculations than Alfred Levant, bound for the house of his uncle, Adolphus Sprade, Esquire, of Tooting, on a mission of inquiry. Alfred Levant was young, not tall, but fitly formed, with bright black eyes, black hair and whiskers, a shaven chin, to show a well-made mouth, and a handsome fellow altogether, pleasant in his speech as in appearance, and gifted with a courteous bearing. He had just sufficiently advanced in the study of medicine to practise, and he meditated entering into partnership with Dr. Phipson, of Dulwich, whose Tooting practise was becoming too large for him. He was, accordingly, bent on making inquiries of Mr. Sprade. Dr. Phipson had spoken of Tooting as being generally reckoned a healthy suburb, much favoured by persons with chronic ailments, real or imaginary, and Levant naturally marked the resources of the neighbourhood as he walked. As

he measured his last mile, still with a spring in his step, he glanced at the houses by the road, and every house he greeted with a smile.

Levant approached his uncle's with some misgiving; he knew he was meek to a fault, and, as a rule, carried himself timidly before the world, but he also knew his convictions were strong, and that his determination to act up to them made him as obstinate as a mule, if not as bold as a lion. Mr. Sprade's chief canon was the rigid observance of a formal Sabbath. To get a Sabbath pure and unadulterated was his ruling passion; he discussed nothing with pleasure that did not bear upon this all-absorbing end, and worked at nothing with a will that did not further it. And so rigidly did he exact this formal observance from himself, his children, and his servants, that he had become one of those unfortunate persons who defeat their most cherished ends by excess of zeal. All in his household, save those whose proper aspirations had been changed by sheer weariness into a dun-coloured endurance, hated the day, and almost hated the religion which prescribed it.

Levant knocked at Mr. Sprade's door just as the Sabbath cloud was beginning to cast its shadow on the domestic hearth. Adolphus himself was closing his account with the world, on a sort of neutral ground, at a neighbouring schoolroom, where, with amiable self-denial, he spent his Saturday evening as cashier to a savings-bank. Levant proposed to himself to call again, but Susan, the eldest of Mr. Sprade's five daughters, lay in ambush behind the drawing-room door, and, at the mention of the name "Levant," came forth in drab, pink nose, and little curls, each with its separate comb, to welcome cousin Alfred in the name of her father. She carried him off in triumph, revelling in the mild excitement of an unexpected and perfectly irreproachable visit, and introduced him to the remainder of the five daughters, all matching each other, with little variation of size, and no variation at all in the fashion of their drab merino dresses, or the gimp and bugles with which they were trimmed. So Barbara, the youngest of the five daughters, might have looked along the

line of elder sisters and have said, "In four years' time I shall be two-and-thirty, and, as sister Deborah, I shall have a wizen look, and be afflicted with whims; in three years more I shall be like sister Julia, and without a maiden's hope; in another two years I shall be as sister Clara, with failing hearing and a growing nervousness; at forty I shall be like sister Susan, and my colour will all have flown to my nose." But Barbara did not say this, because she was not disrespectful.

And when Levant had been introduced to Clara, Julia, Deborah, and Barbara, according to their strict order of precedence, and each of them, in set form, had welcomed cousin Alfred, cousin Alfred assured them he was delighted to find himself so rich in the next best things to sisters. Then cousin Susan resumed her plain needle-work, and cousin Clara sewed a button on pa's shirt, and cousin Julia continued the manufacture of pa's slippers, and cousin Deborah went on knitting pa's stockings, but cousin Barbara, who had been reading aloud from the "Entertaining Dialogues of

Phronissa and her Daughters on select Subjects," closed the volume, and, with pretty bashfulness, sought retirement in tatting.

For two whole hours Levant tried to be gay, as he talked with cousin Susan of friends and relatives, while the four juniors spoke in whispers, and answered yea and nay. Then Mr. Sprade returned, a fair and rather short man of sixty, with a long nose and broad retreating forehead, the mildest of eyes and a little, tapering, tremulous mouth. His coat of black, which was short of waist, long of skirt, and thin in the arms, his trousers of grey, and small gaiters of drab, clothed a curious mixture of the best intentions and the dullest stupidity.

The Sabbath cloud had fallen strong upon Mr. Sprade, and when Levant told him his errand, with some hope of commendation for his professional progress, he shook his head solemnly, and regretted for the hundredth time that his nephew had ever become a doctor.

"The medical profession," said he, "entails Sunday labour, and that, you know, I object to."

With this, he put the whole subject aside until Monday morning, and pressed Levant to be one of the family until then, provided he could put up with the monastic simplicity of their Sabbath fare, an invitation which Levant, of course, accepted. Before going to bed, however, he discovered both breakfast and dinner for the next day displayed in the dining-room, and Mr. Sprade, noticing his surprise, promised his nephew, with as much satisfaction as if he had solved the most difficult problem under the sun, that he would show him with how little labour a Sabbath might be got through.

"We even prepare our salad for our cold meat on a Saturday!" exclaimed Mr. Sprade with pride; "and drink our tea without milk."

At the parish church next morning Levant's attention was casually attracted by the affable countenance of Mr. Wigriff, as it beamed from among those in the high places. Mr. Wigriff's countenance always beamed, and, therefore, those well acquainted with him were un-

conscious of any special cause for remarking the complacency of his lip or the twinkle of his eye. But Mr. Levant, a student of physiognomy, had been attracted to this countenance early in the service by a sudden and remarkable change which came over it, the cause whereof he was quite at a loss to assign.

It must not be supposed that this sudden and remarkable change arose from any reflections given utterance to by the priest; Mr. Wigriff rejoiced for the second time within twenty-four hours over the richness of his own thoughts. It was his custom always to take to church a theme for contemplation. The monotonous tones of the clergyman were to him as the buzzing of summer flies, or, as he put it, "like to the music of the humming-bird in the cool of the evening; a pleasant accompaniment to the dulcet flow of one's own thoughts. The charm," he would say, "is indescribable; the result satisfactory beyond measure. My brain pursues the theme of the day with the swiftness of a bird upon the wing, and with all its ease and grace."

It was natural then that on the morning in question he should pursue his consideration of the unreasonable wants of the shareholders of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company, and of the remedies necessary for the disease from which they suffered. He had already decided on the means for soothing the patient; the counter-irritant was the mystery of the day, and he took it to church with him. The service progressed with all due form and reverence, and Mr. Wigriff's countenance beamed, as usual, with grave complacency; but, when the priest was in the act of intoning the fourth Commandment, Mr. Wigriff gave a little start, and involuntarily sought the pew of Mr. Adolphus Sprade, when he smiled again, for he had discovered the counter-irritant. During the remainder of the service the bright conception was weighed with care, but was not found wanting, and from time to time the eyes of the man of commerce rested on the five damsels, each with her fair hair plainly dressed, each with her straw bonnet plainly trimmed, each with her brown dress neatly covered by her

sober black cloak, and each time he smiled unconscious of the watchful stranger sitting on the other side of meek Mr. Sprade.

Returning home, the great man observed to Mrs. Wigriff, who purred by his side, that the service had charmed him, absolutely charmed him; whereupon his wife responded that the clergyman was a dear man, and Mr. Wigriff acknowledging his excellence, smiled again.

At this moment Mr. Sprade passed by in company with his five daughters and Levant, but not a word did Mr. Wigriff say to him touching the matter which lay so near his heart; he would as soon have incited him to steal the Communion service. An exchange of courtesies was all that passed, and when out of ear-shot Mrs. Wigriff achieved a joke. It was something about "a beau at last."

But very early next morning Mr. Sprade received a note from Mr. Wigriff, dated "Monday morning, seven o'clock," and requesting an interview before leaving for the City. Mr. Sprade granted the request, and Mr. Wigriff was not long in responding in person.

He came in all the splendour of his glossy garments, fresh from the morning's polish.

When Mr. Wigriff solicited his neighbour to become a shareholder in the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company, he assured him, on his word of honour, that in the observance of the Sabbath the Company's spheres should excel the heavenly bodies which, in their sinfulness, revolved alike on Sundays as well as week-days. Mr. Sprade commended this resolution with his whole soul, invested largely, and swore fidelity to the last. This, then, formed the basis of Mr. Wigriff's brilliant conception; and when he found himself in the presence of Mr. Sprade, he exclaimed with much fervour, "Our principles, my dear sir, are in danger. I have received information to the effect that at the general meeting of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company, which, according to the provisions of our Deed of Association, must be held in about three weeks, an effort will be made by a certain section of our shareholders to take the management of the Company out of the hands of its

present directors, and to place it under the direction of those whose distinct intention will be to make the Company's spheres revolve the whole year round, Sundays and holidays included."

As the Company's spheres had not begun to revolve at all, and in all probability never would, the result would most likely have distressed neither party. The declaration, however, awoke in Mr. Sprade the deepest regret, and he expressed himself in appropriate terms. Mr. Wigriff joined with him in lamenting the wickedness of mankind; and when the ebullition of feeling had in some measure subsided, Mr. Sprade inquired, "And what, my friend, do you propose to do to prevent the consummation of this iniquitous resolution?"

"Agitate," Mr. Wigriff thrice repeated. "I shall make it my business to enlist the active sympathies of all our right-minded shareholders, in order to overthrow this foul design, this child of the devil, lest we have to write 'Ichabod' over our door, and in all future time pay allegiance to Beelzebub."

"Very good," said Mr. Sprade meekly, rubbing his hands, "very good; but are we strong enough, think you? The world is so enamoured of money-making, so regardless of the privileges of the Sabbath."

Mr. Wigriff shook his head profoundly, and observed, "It is doubtful, but I think we are. At least, no effort shall be spared to impress every vestige of influence we have to save the Company, and you, my dear sir, are a tower of strength in yourself; because, allow me to say, your fulcrum is a principle, and your lever conviction."

Mr. Sprade smiled bashfully as the man of commerce delivered this sentiment with a patronizing wave of the hand; and when Mr. Sprade had again sworn fidelity, and Mr. Wigriff had promised to keep him well informed, the monarch of investors set out for the City, and called on Mr. Cribb by the way. The two then waited on a common acquaintance named Snazell, a loud-voiced man with red hair and a stubby beard, to whom they presented one share in the Planetary Evolution Locomo-

tive Company, with the assurance that his sole object in life was to get the Company's spheres to revolve every day in the year, including Sundays and all holidays, and that he was constrained to move to that effect at the coming meeting. Mr. Snazell assured them in return that they had stated his design precisely, and that he intended moving, not only a resolution, but heaven and earth to carry it out.

This done, Mr. Wigriff called a meeting of directors, who by this time had begun to feel uncommonly business-like in their new offices, with two clerks to attend their behests, and a general meeting in prospect. Mr. Wigriff's proposed dividend was cordially approved, because, as Lord Berrypurt said, it gave the idea of general prosperity, which it was very desirable to set afloat; and Mr. Spendrill concluded in the light of the same proposition that he had much underrated his own powers, for assuredly a two per cent. dividend was not to be despised, and he began to think of undertaking the management of his own affairs, in hopes of a like result.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COLONEL HOPES TO COME UPON HARRY UNAWARES.

AGAIN in the early morning Mabel looked out across the river, and wearied herself with vain musings on her brother's absence, courting hopes of Margaret's success, and striving with fears of his utter loss. And again the Colonel came knocking at her door, and calling her by name. This time he wore a large brown overcoat, with a high velvet collar and scanty sleeves.

"Mabel," said he, "Mabel, I'm going out, I say."

"Surely not, grandfather," said Mabel, taking him by the hand, for he nervously plucked at the cuffs of his coat, and looked about him wistfully. "Why would you go, since your cold is so bad?"

"To seek Harry, my dear, in hopes of coming on him unawares. Why should we not come upon him unawares, you and I? I've heard of such things, so let us walk out day by day, my dear."

"But it's very early, grandfather, and the morning air will strike very coldly to you, who never go out."

"It must be early, Mabel, or the people will be about," the old man whispered.

"But," said Mabel, "if no people are about when we walk, how can we hope to fall in with Harry?"

"I shouldn't mind Harry being about, my dear, but strangers," he whispered cautiously; and as Mabel turned aside to hide the pain these simple words awoke in her, he said, "I have a presentiment, my dear, that we shall come upon him unawares, yes, unawares," he added; and again he looked about him wistfully, and plucked at the sleeves of his coat.

So Mabel thought it prudent to give way, and clothing herself in her bonnet and winter cloak, for the year was still young, and the

morning very raw, she took the old man by the hand and led him out. The wind from down the river burst upon them with a boisterous welcome, and though it lifted Mabel's hair from her face and fetched a rosy bloom upon her cheek, it blanched the old man's features, and made him shudder from head to foot. Then Mabel's fears were re-awakened, but her grandfather persisted, and soon they attained the meagre shelter of the houses in John Street. The wind now swept them on to the Strand, and there it met them again as they walked Citywards. It was but little beyond seven o'clock, so that there were comparatively few people in the street; a newspaper cart and a cab or two drove at high speed towards some railway station; a milkwoman, still wearing the freshness of the country in her face, carried her pails cheerily; shopboys with damp hair and blighted features, having nothing whatever of the country about them, took down the shutters, polished brass plates, or jeered at their neighbours; enterprising drapers in shirt-sleeves formed showy silks into ima-

ginary skirts in their window-fronts, and enterprising clothiers were treating their dummies to entirely new suits, or hanging out whole armies of garments with chain and padlock, as if delicately hinting that, in addition to their other excellent qualities, they could walk of themselves. Besides these there were some factory-girls, shopmen, and others on the way to their work; but though the City seemed but half awake, the old man with his high-collared brown coat, led by the sweet-faced girl, had many to look on them, and wonder whence they came and what could be their errand. Yet Mabel saw very few of them; her eyes were too often scanning the hard lines of the Colonel's blanched face as he eagerly peered about him, thinking to find a youth whose face he scarce remembered, even as a child. And as they slowly moved along the wind came sweeping in their front, shaking the old man as if in cruel sport. Sometimes it would even oblige him to stand still, until its violence was spent; then Mabel, all trembling herself, would hold him sternly

by the arm, and so they would wait, with their heads bowed to the storm. And each time the wind thus burst upon them the Colonel shuddered with the cold, and Mabel could discern no healthy flushing in his cheek when the gust had spent itself. It was so as they turned the corner by St. Clement's Church, and when the lull came, the old man, trembling again, almost wept in his weakness, and Mabel wept indeed to find him so in need of help, and she so helpless. But though the tears came thick and fast, she never tired in her gentle care of him; and when he motioned to her that he would go home, she hid her tears and smiled. So they returned as they came, save that the wind helped them in their journey, and there were more people in the streets to note, with silent sympathy, the young girl's watchfulness, as with grave solicitude she would gently guide the old man's faltering steps, or mark the weariness with which his face was stricken.

And there was need for all this deep concern, for when they were back again at home,

despite the anxious care of Mabel and the kindly ministrations of Mrs. Pavey, spurred on by her own copious lamentations, the old man lay in stern extremity, racked by cold.

By-and-by, as matters seemed to grow worse instead of better, Mrs. Pavey advised that a doctor should be summoned; and she and Mabel discussed this knotty point in the light of the old man's known antipathy to strangers and special aversion to doctors. At length, in conformity with their resolution, Mrs. Pavey went to seek one, and shortly returned with an assistant, in default of his principal, by name Alfred Levant, and with his coming Mabel no longer wanted hope. His passing salutation, more grateful to her from its novelty than the charms of the brightest summer's day, and the sparkle of his eyes, which seemed so ready in their search for the patient, so swift in measuring his needs, filled her with thankfulness to think how highly favoured she had been to gain from the cold and barren world help of such sterling promise; so marking the earnestness with which he went about

his work, and listening to his assuring voice, so soft and musical that his very speech was medicine to the sick man, her trust in him grew to be quite absolute, and without knowing it she stood upon the very verge of love.

The examination of the patient ended, Mabel conducted the young doctor to the anteroom, where he had left his hat, and there Levant made a note of the case. As he put up his note-book, he looked at Mabel with a smile, and said, "I'm sure you'll forgive me for saying that you very much remind me by feature as well as name of an old schoolfellow of mine."

"Do I!" exclaimed Mabel clasping her hands as they hung before her. She thought they had indeed fallen upon Harry unawares, and she asked earnestly, "What was your schoolfellow's name, sir?"

Levant noticed Mabel's eagerness, and feared he had done mischief. So he answered carelessly, "It was only a fancy of mine; his name was Harry Willwend."

"Where was he at school with you, and when?" asked Mabel, whose excitement grew apace.

Levant answered that the place was Windsor, but the time he named Mabel feared was too far distant to be of use to Margaret.

And when the failing hope these few chance words had reawakened into vigorous life had shrunk back again to its old shrivelled form, to wait in eager watchfulness for the next ray of light, Mabel told her new-found friend how Harry had disappeared from the care of her grandfather's lawyer, Mr. Wigriff, and had never since been heard of.

"Mr. Wigriff, of Tooting?" asked Levant.

"Of Serjeants' Inn," said Mabel, who had never heard of Tooting.

"Perhaps of Serjeants' Inn too," said Levant. "A stout man?"

"Yes," said Mabel.

And Levant, responding to the suspicion of dislike with which Mabel's tone was unintentionally tinged, said with something of the mimic in his manner, "And pompous, eh?"

Mabel laughed as she assented, and Levant rejoined, "I know the man, he's a friend of my uncle's; and if pleasing to you, I should be very glad to speak with him on the matter, in the hope of assisting in the discovery of—"

Levant's voice dropped, for Mabel had turned her head aside as if pained by his offer, and he stood before her so confused that he could not find words for an apology. Presently, however, Mabel answered with some constraint, "I would prefer, sir, that you said nothing to Mr. Wigriff of your visit here." Then hesitating, she looked down before she added, "If you would keep all that has passed between us a secret until I see you again, I should be very much obliged, and then perhaps I may tell you my reasons for making so extraordinary a request."

Of course Levant was only too happy to accede to this; he promised inviolable secrecy, and apologized for having surprised Mabel into a relation of facts which she would doubtless have preferred keeping in her own breast. Mabel on her part insisted he had

acted from the best of motives, and thanked him warmly for his good intentions. Thus, with the addition of a formal leavetaking, they parted in the most prosaic manner, but both looked forward to the next visit to the patient.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. LEEP SUCCUMBS TO BLANDISHMENT.

A LADY in mourning, standing at the entrance to Serjeants' Inn, generally looking up or down Fleet Street, but always with her whole attention and the fringe of her glances on the Inn itself, became an object of interest to the general public; and at 5.35 P.M. an old man, with a tall hat and a stoop, of mean appearance and slouching in gait, became an object of interest to the lady in mourning as he issued from No. 4 and shuffled into Fleet Street. As she followed him, the general public, which at the best was but indolently observant, lost all interest in her and her movements, and treated the man she followed as dirt. The two went Citywards; when he slouched she walked, when he halted she stopped; she followed him just

as she had followed Mrs. Pavey a week before, and in due time she came to Gunpowder Alley. Then noticing the house with a broken bell-handle and a cracked doorstep as that which Antony Leep entered, she passed on.

Next day at noon she stood on the cracked doorstep and inquired for Mr. Leep, found he was not at home as she desired, and asked for Mrs. Leep. She was directed to the "three pair front," a promotion which Mr. Leep had achieved a short time previously, and made her way thither with considerable misgivings, on account of the odours which oozed from the several doors she passed. Arrived at the "three pair front," an unpretending tap at the door produced a lumping sound within as of the tumbling of a heavy body on the floor, followed by a shuffling about which lasted for a minute by the clock. Mrs. Leep then appeared at the door, several degrees redder and frowsier than usual. Margaret hoped Mrs. Leep was well, and offered her a present which she described with great delicacy as "a cordial." Mrs. Leep complained of a griping

pain in her right side, and regretted that her poverty and ill-health combined to reduce her establishment to a penurious condition quite unfit for a lady, by which Mrs. Leep referred to herself. Margaret, alluding to Mrs. Leep's illness, hoped the cordial would lend relief; and as for the state of her apartments, begged Mrs. Leep "not to mention it." She might have added that there was no necessity to do so, for the odour of dirt saluted the visitor most loudly.

"I'm sure you're very kind, mum, and the very sight of that cordial makes me well; and if you wouldn't take it imperlite, I'd draw the cork at once."

"Oh dear no," said Margaret, "if it would do you the least good pray take a glass at once."

"Well, that *is* kind," exclaimed Mrs. Leep, producing a corkscrew and a couple of glasses. She then inquired how Margaret would "take it," and offered to have the kettle boiling at once if she preferred it hot, but Margaret declined with many thanks, and Mrs. Leep

observed, with her hand upon her side, "As the spasms is awful just at present, if you'll excuse me I'll take it cold, with just a leetle water in it to help digestion."

It was a very leetle water that Mrs. Leep added, and when she had sipped the mixture, she declared it extremely good, and observed in quite a lively strain, "You'll excuse my dishabil apperiens, for if the truth must be told, I've been seeing what a dolsey would do to bring me round; and as I always makes a point of bringing myself round before evening, so as to be good company for Tony, I hope you won't think me rude if I sits myself down before the fire at onst."

With this Mrs. Leep composed herself in a large arm-chair, and putting her feet on a high stool before the fire, she folded her arms and seemed quite contented. Indeed, she apparently became so indifferent to everything around her that Margaret grew anxious, and asked whether it would please Mrs. Leep to engage in conversation, to which Mrs. Leep replied with perfect composure, "You may do

jist exactly what you please, my dear, and how you please and when you please; *I'm* a-going to have a dolsey." And with this Mrs. Leep smiled and hugged herself.

Then Margaret said she was very glad to find Mrs. Leep in tolerably good health, because she wished to learn the whereabouts of Harry Willwend. On this Mrs. Leep said, "Oh" and sniffed, as if disposed to resent interference with her dolsey; so Margaret made an end of her explanation by asking Mrs. Leep to tell her whither Harry had been sent.

"And what do I see in you, my dear, that I should give you this important bit of information?" asked Mrs. Leep with a sniff and another hug.

Margaret laid a sovereign on the table, and Mrs. Leep's half-closed eyes twinkled, but immediately afterwards they closed altogether, and her head waved gently to and fro on its cushion. Presently her right eye opened and winked, and Margaret inquired how many sovereigns it would be necessary to put down before she could take the information up.

"Five," said Mrs. Leep. "Three now and two when I've told you what you ask."

So Margaret put three sovereigns on the table, but Mrs. Leep asked her to be good enough to put them in her outstretched hand. When this had been done, Mrs. Leep, still reclining, said, "Take a wooden box out of that cupboard, my dear."

Margaret obeyed; the box was a little one, pasted over with marbled paper, and when Margaret had it in her hand, Mrs. Leep, still with her eyes shut, said, "Give it a good knock on the right end, my dear."

Margaret did so, and the tractable lock yielded to the shock.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Leep, "you'll find three packets of papers in that box, two big ones and a little one. The big ones is of no sort of use to you, but the littlest is. It's made up of two slips of paper, and a letter in its envelope, all tied up with a piece of string. Now, if you takes the letter out, my dear, and reads it you'll know all I know."

Margaret did not obey this time; she began

to doubt Mrs. Leep, and instead of searching the box remained perfectly still. Presently the old woman opened her eyes with a start and said, "Oh, my dear, haven't you got the box?"

"There it is," said Margaret, pushing it towards Mrs. Leep, who immediately retorted, "Then why don't you do as I tell you? Take out the littlest bundle and read the letter."

"I should prefer you to do it," said Margaret, with some asperity.

"No, my dear, it's out of the question. I likes my ease, and your cordial's made me uncommon comfortable."

With this Mrs. Leep sniffed and hugged herself again; so Margaret gave way, and taking the packet, which answered the description given, held it before the old woman's eyes as she asked, "Is this it?"

The old woman twitched her face about as if she were fruitlessly trying to open her eyes, and then said, "I've no doubt you're right, my dear; take the letter out and read it."

Margaret hesitated only an instant, then

drew the letter from the packet and read the complaint of David Jenkins, gardener, touching his runaway apprentice. It awoke in her much the same feelings as had disturbed Antony Leep on the night it was first received, but Margaret quickly winnowed out the little hope that could be drawn from it, and asked, "Where does David Jenkins live?"

"Look at the postmark on the envelope, my dear, and there you'll find the date as well marked, as plain as ever the postman's stamp can mark it."

"Aberglidd!" said Margaret.

"With double D at the end of it, my dear?"

"And who's Mr. True?"

"Mr. Wigriff's partner as were, my dear. He died a week after he took that blessed boy away and lost him, just like Tony used to try to lose the cat. And if it wasn't a judgment on him, I'm not a confined invallid."

Mrs. Leep paused a minute or two, and Margaret thought also in silence, until Mrs. Leep observed, "Now, my dear, if you've seen enough, put the letter by, and give the

box a good knock on the left-hand, so as to lock it, my dear."

Margaret did as she was bid, and when she had put the box in the cupboard, Mrs. Leep held out her hand, speechless and blind; but as soon as the two sovereigns chinked on her palm, the hand closed and her eyes opened as she made this profound observation, "Now, my dear, I can take my solemn oath to Tony, as I've always done, that I've never told a soul what's in that box, nor seen anybody a-pryin' into it, which if I hadn't troubled you, my dear, I never could have done."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHROUD WHICH TIME HAD WOVEN.

MARGARET had journeyed into Wales that night, and early next morning set out for the house of David Jenkins, gardener. She had no difficulty in finding him, for David was well known, and her coachman drove her straight to the garden-gate. David, standing in the pathway to his cottage, hailed the appearance of an unknown lady, in mourning, with delight, for new customers were rare. He touched his cap as Margaret approached; and as she drew nearer he peered into her face with the determination, despite her stern looks, to reduce her to the condition of a most pliant customer. But his hopes were rudely shaken by his visitor's first remark, which simply required information concerning Harry Willwend. David at

once concluded that he was in the presence of Harry's mother; so, resolving to act with special caution, he answered, as he set down a bundle of sticks, "Well, indeed, now, I had a 'prentice of that name, but he was run away in the night, 'oo see."

David slowly scratched the back of his head, and watched the effect these words had on his vistor, but Margaret gave no sign, and simply asked, "And what has happened since?"

"Well, I wrote to the gentleman who was bind him with me, but I have seen neither gentleman nor boy since. No, indeed, now. And I think it was treating me very bad after the trouble I had with the boy."

David shook his head disparagingly; and as Margaret was rather at a loss for something to say, she agreed with him, greatly to his surprise and satisfaction. Then with a sidelong look at Margaret he asked, "Are you the boy's mother, now?"

Margaret laughed a denial, and then added with serious emphasis, "The boy has been wronged, Mr. Jenkins, grievously wronged."

"Ay, indeed, now, but I did take him for his good, indeed, now."

Margaret seemed to admit this, and asked whether David had no papers relating to Harry. The gardener answered that he had nothing but his indentures and Mr. True's address; then he asked whether Margaret knew Mr. True, and was told that she had never seen him, so he scratched his head, quite unable to comprehend what the lady could want with the boy, or to what end she inquired about him. And when Margaret asked, "Where do you recommend that I should search for this boy?"

David answered, half pettishly, "I don't know, indeed, not I."

And the two stood in doubt on the path which led from the cottage to the hill that looked over the sea, the path which Harry took when he resolved that Aberglidd should know him no more.

Margaret, at length, broke the silence by asking the gardener to write to her if he heard of Harry in time to come. David promised to do so, and having pondered over Margaret's

address, he asked, "Was you want to send the boy back here, now?"

Margaret chased this terrible suspicion from David Jenkins's mind, and having pondered awhile he said, "You live in London?"

Margaret nodded, and the gardener went on as he watched her askance.

"My boy Abraham is in service in London with a Mr. Roylstone; he was here when the boy Harry come, and knows as much as I do if you see him."

Margaret made no mention of her knowledge of Abram for an ill-looking cub, as she thanked the gardener for his information, and promised, but with little hopes of profit, to find the boy out. The father, however, observed, with much unction, "Abram is a good lad, ma'am; his master speaks of him very good; 'es, indeed."

Margaret smiled, but made no remark, and in a little time she was standing on the top of the hill, looking over the sea towards the white stone in the heather, while David Jenkins watched her from his cottage door, and her

carriage waited for her in the road to the village of Aberglidd. Thus, unwittingly, she walked in the very footsteps of the boy she sought, but knew not whither to turn. A mist hung over the land and over the sea, and joined the waters with the clouds, as if the air were heavy with the sweat of a toiling world. So the white stone in the heather was hidden from Margaret's sight, and a veil of thicker growth hid Harry Willwend's track. The few who must have met him in his wayward course would surely have forgotten him, she thought, for doubtless time had wrapped a shroud around all memory of his going, the warp whereof was twice a thousand days, and the woof fond recollections of loved friends and happy times not to be forgotten.

CHAPTER XVII.

CERTAIN GENTLEMEN FAIL TO MAKE A PLEASURE OF BUSINESS.

THE annual general meeting of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company was duly advertised to be holden at the London Tavern, and shortly before the time of meeting, the directors assembled in an anteroom finally to consider their programme. Unhappily, for their peace of mind, things were not going on as satisfactorily as they had hoped. Mr. Spendrill was almost moved to tears, on account of a threatening letter he had received from a shareholder, who declared he had taken shares on the faith of Mr. Spendrill's commercial standing, an unheard-of piece of presumption Mr. Hockley thought, and he had since been assured the company was nothing better than

a bubble. The two peers had had a leading article in *The Financier's Guardian* adversely considering their claims to confidence, and roundly upbraiding them for having no commercial policy. The chairman complained of the additional infliction of a letter from a man named Snazell, promising the directors trouble if they for a moment entertained any proposal to prevent their business being carried on on Sunday; and Mr. Hockley announced an appeal to himself, as a pillar of the church, from a Mr. Sprade, to withstand all attempts to make the spheres revolve on a Sunday, and he intended to respond to that appeal as a pillar of the church should. The chairman, therefore, hoped Mr. Hockley did not think he intended to oppose that very proper determination, and Mr. Hockley recommended his lordship not to, in a rather more threatening manner than the occasion seemed to warrant.

In the meantime the shareholders gathered in tolerably large numbers, ominously silent in their anger. One or two shook their heads knowingly as they talked in a mysterious

manner over the Directors' Report, and others scowled in silence at the seats reserved for the directors. Mr. Sprade, in the front row, meekly examined his finger-nails, and Mr. Snazell, a little in the rear, watched Mr. Sprade as a bull-dog.

Things had come to this pass when Mr. Wigriff arrived arm-in-arm with Mr. Cribb. Both heard the news of the hour undisturbed, and urged their friends not to distress themselves about trifles. Mr. Spendrill was constrained to resent this; he considered his commercial standing as anything but a trifle, and Lord Berrypurt would have supported him if he had not been busy in a corner manufacturing a policy for the conciliation of the shareholders and the confusion of *The Financier's Guardian.* Mr. Carter-Striver found him so engaged, and being in the confidence of Mr. Wigriff, instructed him as to the probable course of the meeting and the best way to conduct himself. Lord Mendroight was coached by Mr. Wigriff, who, as well as Mr. Carter-Striver, exercised a politic reticence and dealt

solely in generalities. Mr. Cribb pooh-poohed everything and everybody in a confidential manner to Mr. Spendrill, and Mr. Hockley amused himself by putting a few leading questions to Mr. Blight touching his political faith. So these influential conductors of a great commercial undertaking prepared to meet their constituents, and by the time signs of impatience were heard among the assembled shareholders, Mr. Wigriff flattered himself that the whole of the directors, unable to act of themselves, were in a perfectly docile condition, only waiting to be led. He accordingly invited them to the scene of action, and proudly led the way. As they had not far to walk, they succeeded tolerably well in making believe they were not painfully conscious that the eyes of the meeting were upon them, and, on the whole, the most dissatisfied shareholder was bound to admit to himself it was a very solid-looking board. The Earl Mendroight's placid smile rivalled Mr. Wigriff's unapproachable complacency; and Mr. Cribb's travesty of dignity was surpassed by the *nonchalance* of

Mr. Hockley, who walked in actually blowing his nose. Mr. Roylstone came in with the bewildered air of a philosopher, Messrs. Spendrill and Blight might have been taken for philosophers too, and Lord Berrypurt looked wise enough to be the author of a dozen policies. A finer-looking board could not have been mustered in the City, but its qualities were insufficient to evoke a cheer from the audience; and Mr. Carter-Striver drew an extremely long breath as he and his fellows took their seats in silence. Mr. Guffey was absent, but Harry Willwend presided at a small table in the rear of Mr. Wigriff, and supplied the great man with such books and papers as he needed. First came the minutes of the last general meeting, which Mr. Wigriff read with much unction. But before they were confirmed a shareholder inquired in an aggressive tone whether all the *t*'s were crossed and all the *i*'s dotted. Mr. Wigriff pondered for a moment, and then assured the meeting that they were so, with the exception of the capitals. This rejoinder was warmly

received, and business was progressing, when a nervous little man with a shrill voice stopped the way by inquiring why he had not received a report.

"Will you favour us with your name, sir?" asked the chairman.

"Boggle," replied the little man. "I've been a shareholder from the first commencement, and never had but one notice and that was for money."

This was received with cries of "Shame!" but Mr. Wigriff, after consultation with Harry, replied in measured tones:

"We have forwarded many letters to you, sir, but they have always been returned with the word 'deceased' written upon them."

Mr. Boggle protested he was not dead, and Mr. Wigriff rejoined, "We are delighted to hear it; have the goodness, Mr. Wade, to make a note that Mr. Boggle is not dead."

Harry made the note, and Mr. Boggle occupied himself with the unwelcome suspicion that his wife was at the bottom of his discomfiture; he feared she had renewed a practice

of writing "Dead" on all letters from joint ruination companies whenever her husband showed symptoms of a speculative fever, and in this he was very near the truth.

The Directors' Report, which, according to custom, was taken as read, briefly announced that the board had not had sufficient time to surmount all the difficulties in the way of carrying out their scheme, but that it hoped soon to do so. In the meantime, however, the directors were happy in being able to state that, by a careful manipulation of the capital placed at their disposal, they were able to declare a two-per-cent. dividend. In conclusion the report counselled patience and promised a glorious future.

Also, according to custom, the chairman proceeded to revolve round the report and move its adoption. By keeping his eye carefully fixed on the paragraph with which he dealt, he managed to pursue an idea without much stumbling, but in an evil moment his ambition tempted him to a rhetorical flourish; the idea immediately took advantage of him,

and was dodging round the corner in an instant, never to be recovered. At another time he was lost in a maze of his own making. Inadvertently trusting himself in a parenthesis, he missed his way, and wandered amongst innumerable words in a fruitless effort to find the other bracket, gave it up, doubled, made a jump for the end of the sentence, came down with a run from sheer exhaustion, muttered a few inaudible words, cleared his throat, and commenced afresh with "Well, gentlemen," as if everything he had said before was perfectly clear. Then, with smiling confidence, he would run in the well-known path of hopes of prosperity to come, and all those directors who had a guilty knowledge of being ignorant of everything except board-fees, took confidence also, and some made elaborate calculations on blotting-paper touching the evolutions of the Company's spheres.

At length the chairman, who, as speeches go, had acquitted himself with tolerable success, permitted himself to believe he had said enough, though as a matter of fact he had

imparted no information whatever, and he sat down with a more profound sense of responsibility and helplessness than he had ever before experienced.

"The die is cast," he whispered to Mr. Wigriff, with a look of abject wretchedness.

"And thrown with remarkable judgment," said Mr. Wigriff. "That admirable speech has saved us."

This well-timed compliment served Lord Mendroight as a tonic, if it did not prevent a fit of apoplexy; the noble lord recovered his equanimity almost immediately, and was able to smile graciously on a gentleman of insinuating manner who rose from the body of the meeting.

The gentleman in question was evidently fond of hearing himself talk, and had an unusually high opinion of his elocution. When, therefore, with a mincing flow of words, he delared he had entered the room without any intention of opening his mouth, no one believed him, but all, with one accord, put his exordium aside and settled down to listen to

the material portion of his speech, which simply amounted to a declaration that it was always pleasant to receive dividends, and he had no intention of refusing that offered on this occasion, but that he should really like to know how it had come about, because the whole proceeding passed his comprehension.

The chairman said their managing director would be best able to answer that question, and Mr. Wigriff thereupon observed, with becoming dignity, that it had not been thought advisable to publish to the world the whole of the Company's private concerns, but for the satisfaction of the hon. proprietor he mentioned in strict confidence that he and his friend Mr. Roylstone had ventured on an experimental voyage in one of the Company's spheres to Central Asia, where, as every one knew, diamonds were as abundant as pebbles, and whence no European had ever before returned. Having selected a valley as rich in precious stones as that which Sinbad the Sailor had discovered, Mr. Roylstone allowed the sphere to descend, to the great alarm of

the natives, who all, with one accord, fled. While their backs were turned, he and his worthy friend, who carried the necessary tools, shovelled a quantity of diamonds into a sack, and, before the natives had recovered their fright, they were back on Salisbury Plain. The proceeds from the sale of these diamonds, some of which proved very valuable, formed the profits which the directors now proposed to divide.

Another shareholder, gifted with the same flow of language as the other, complimented the directors on their energy, and remarking with satisfaction that they would evidently never let the grass grow under their feet, he asked whether a second voyage was contemplated.

Mr. Wigriff hoped the hon. proprietor would forgive him if he took exception to his figure of speech, because, as the directors proposed to travel in mid air, it was quite immaterial to them whether grass grew under their feet or not: the Directors of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company were above grass and all terrene obstructions.

"Hear, hear," exclaimed Mr. Roylstone and the inquiring shareholder in a breath. "But," said Mr. Wigriff, becoming grave again, "in reply to the hon. proprietor, I have to say that the directors doubt whether it would be wise to risk losing the services of our eminent friend Mr. Roylstone by authorizing another trip fraught with the danger which necessarily attends such a journey; the board accordingly proposes to devote its energies to the grand object in view, so as to come before you at the next meeting with the spheres in full operation."

The cheer which followed this was wholly due to Mr. Snazell's undemonstrative lead, and hopes were entertained that the report would pass without another word, but a shareholder, with a pencil in one hand and a report in the other, rose near the directors' table, and, having challenged every statement made by the board, denounced each individual director as incompetent, and the whole scheme as chimerical. Mr. Snazell, thinking it time to interfere, disposed of the last speaker by saying

that all his observations were beside the question. The only thing he could charge the directors with was want of expedition; he understood they refused to allow their engineers to work on a Sunday, and to this he attributed all delays. But he was content to accept his dividend as compensation for the errors of the past, on the understanding that the directors would not permit such squeamishness to control them in the future. Mr. Sprade came next, and, denouncing Mr. Snazell for his godlessness, hoped the directors would not listen to his profane counsel. Mr. Snazell retorted that Mr. Sprade was the last man who should talk such trash, inasmuch as he was actually born on a Sunday, and had, consequently, been a Sabbath-breaker from the beginning. Mr. Sprade, with uplifted hands, denied the calumny, and declared he was born early on a Monday morning, whereupon Mr. Snazell showed the case was ten times worse, because he must have kept his parents' house in a state of confusion the whole of Sunday; and, having enlarged thereon, advised toleration

and patience on the part of the shareholders, and speedy action on the part of the board.

The meeting was still inclined to rebel, but Mr. Carter-Striver diverted them with a true parliamentary effort, considerably shortened for increased effect, and he was followed by Mr. Wigriff, who ensured success.

Thus this decoction of public folly went its impotent way, and Mr. Wigriff had a new lease of the Company's capital, which he hoped to use with much profit to himself, while the great secret of propulsion was being developed in the high tower at Boulderstairs Court.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DIVERS CHANCE MEETINGS.

When Harry's young ambition imagined its first resting-place in the possession of a wig and gown, he inquired touching the process by which this place could be attained. He found, much to his surprise, that it was held by custom among those learned in the law that, for a man to be a lawyer, he must, of all things, know how to eat a good dinner, and be able to pay for it; all things else seemed to be subsidiary and purely optional, except the payment of certain heavy fees, an appetizing process, however, to which no embryo barrister could object. It was true, a candidate for legal honours was expected either to attend a series of lectures by doctors of law, or to arrange for receiving instruction from a full-blown barris-

ter in private, but in neither case was it required that scholarship in law should result. Indeed, in all cases, whether the matter offered came from the accomplished cook, the lecturer in the class-room, or the barrister-at-law in his chambers, digestion was left entirely with the student; it seemed to be accounted impertinent to presume that his digestion was otherwise than sound; it was taken for granted that he had received all that had been tendered to him, and had assimilated all he had received. Accordingly, so many dinners and so many lectures, prefaced and supplemented by so much in fees, made a barrister learned in the law! Pursuing his researches, Harry found that, generally speaking, a well-to-do candidate, who desired the position for ornament's sake, paid great attention to the cook and none to the lecturer; that he digested the dinner involuntarily, but declined altogether to digest the law, because the task was fraught with trouble from beginning to end; also, that, generally speaking, the needy or ambitious candidate, bent on earning a livelihood or

making a snatch at the woolsack, attended both lectures and dinners, received both heartily, and, as ability permitted, digested both.

So, by the advice and assistance of Julian Leep and Mr. Guffey, Harry paid his preparatory fees, and commenced eating his way to the bar of his country, and by the time the annual meeting of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company was held, as recorded in the last chapter, he had made considerable progress. It was necessary, however, that he should dine in hall on that day, and at a minute or two before five he was hastening up the steps of the Inner Temple Hall. In his hurry he jostled against Mr. Guffey, also bound for the dining-hall.

"Holloa, sir, you weren't at the meeting to-day?" said Harry with an apology.

"What meeting?" asked Mr. Guffey.

"Our annual meeting."

"Dear me," said Mr. Guffey unconcernedly, "I quite forgot all about it."

The charm of Planetary Evolution had been superseded by the novelty of spirit rapping,

and Mr. Guffey, assisted by Master Bustin, who had discovered great powers as a medium, had been spending the whole of the day in courting ghostly communications.

Harry took advantage of the comparative fewness of the diners to invite Mr. Guffey to a separate table with himself. Mr. Guffey assented without hesitation, and set zealously to work upon the soup. Harry as impetuously plied him with sounding questions upon a subject which had begun to cause him much trouble, the solvency or rather the genuineness of the Company, and his own connection with it.

"It was a very unsatisfactory meeting," said Harry.

"Oh, was it?"

"Some of the shareholders seemed very angry."

"Oh, were they; what about?"

"Well," said Harry hesitating, "they don't seem to think things are going on altogether straight."

"There's nothing wrong I hope," said Mr.

Guffey with awakening interest. "I've got some shares, you know."

"Well," said Harry, "what do *you* think?"

"Upon my word, I'm sure I don't know. What does Wigriff think; he doesn't think anything's wrong, eh?"

"Mr. Wigriff," answered Harry oracularly, "thinks what he thinks because he knows what he knows; but what is the precise condition of the Company, or what are his plans, neither you nor any other director has full cognizance of. Where's the capital?"

"Invested," said Mr. Guffey, intent on the next course.

"In what?"

"Wigriff knows; I don't."

"Have you seen the securities?"

"No."

"Has any director seen them?"

"I don't know."

"Does any director know anything but what Mr. Wigriff tells him?"

"Well, I don't think he does," said Mr. Guffey. "It really never occurred to me in that light before."

"Then I'll tell you what," said Harry gravely, "if it were proper for me to do so, I should give you some advice."

"Oh, would you? let's assume it's proper, and give it. Come now, tell me what you would advise, for really I have given very little attention to the subject."

"Then I should say, if you will allow me, that you should go in for a regular examination of the whole business, and see for yourself that all is square, or else resign at once."

"I'll resign to-morrow," said Mr. Guffey with a feeling of intense relief.

"But what of those who have come in by your influence, and who have trusted to you to secure their interests?"

"Nobody has that I know of."

"Your name has been published, and Mr. Jubb came to the office the other day and—"

"Jubb's a born fool," exclaimed Mr. Guffey in exasperation. "I'll resign to-morrow; I'm sick of the whole business, and don't believe anything will come of it."

Silence ensued for a time, and then Harry

asked, "What would you recommend me to do?"

Mr. Guffey had no idea, but, with a view to find one, asked Harry to state his case. Harry explained that he feared if the Company went wrong he would be included, by those who knew him, in the general condemnation of all concerned in it. Then his two names troubled him.

"Whatever," said he, "the motive which suggested the proceeding, the result is exceedingly unsatisfactory. Imagine my position this evening at Mrs. Carter-Striver's assembly; I shall have to go as Wade, and be so introduced to people to whom I should prefer being known as Willwend, and whom, ten to one, I shall meet as Willwend in a year or two. It's very inconvenient, and I can't afford not to go to Carter-Striver's."

This accidentally reminded Mr. Guffey that he also was invited to the Carter-Striver assembly, which up to this time he had forgotten as completely as he had lost all remembrance of the meeting.

"Well, really, my boy, it's a terrible pity; all these things seem to be happening at once. Have you any idea yourself? Is there anything you'd like to do? I can see the awkwardness of the position, but it's one I never contemplated. Have you told Wigriff?"

"Mr. Wigriff," said Harry almost bitterly, "has never said or done anything which could be construed into an admission of the faintest kind that my name is anything but Wade."

Mr. Guffey thought that very extraordinary, but made light of it, and again asked Harry what he would like to do.

"I think it would be best in the end," he said, "if I had no more to do with the Company."

"So do I," said Mr. Guffey, with as much relish as if he had never thought anything else.

Harry felt better after having made this declaration. He had been for a long time nursing this grievance against Mr. Wigriff. His pride had forbidden him to speak of it to Julian Leep, the only other beside Mr. Guffey to whom he could have turned for advice under

the circumstances. But even now he was unable boldly to say he distrusted Mr. Wigriff, personally, for when he weighed the whole matter carefully, he found nothing in the great man's ponderous courtesy and generally patronizing style, irritating as it was, but what accorded with the strict carrying out of the understanding first set up between them through Mr. Guffey's instrumentality. It was true he had never said or done anything capable of being construed into an admission of his knowledge that Harry's name was other than Wade, but it was equally true that he had never said or done anything to favour the suspicion that his motive in originally suggesting a change of name, was other than a desire to promote Harry's good. In that way, Harry's reason joined issue with his instinct, or his pride, whichever it was, and meantime he nursed his grievance.

Dinner ended, this oddly assorted couple walked westwards through the Temple Courts, bound for their respective dressing-rooms. But in Pump Court their attention was arrested

by the troubles of an apparently once stalwart old man, dressed in an old-fashioned brown overcoat with high collar and tight sleeves. He was resting with his right hand against a wall, as he coughed with unusual violence, and near him, holding his other arm, stood a young gentlewoman whose fair face bespoke the weight of her anxiety. It was Colonel Willwend and Mabel come out in the hopes of falling in with Harry unawares; but the old man had met one less welcome, for Death grinned over his shoulder at the passers by, as he embraced him with his bony arms, and the sands were low in the hour-glass standing in the doorway hard by.

"Get me home, my dear," they heard the old man gasp; "my che—"

As the Colonel gained his voice, Death slipped aside, and grinned in the shadow of the doorway as he eyed his hour-glass.

Mr. Guffey suggested they should help the old man to a cab, so Harry asked of Mabel, "Shall we assist you?"

"If you please, sir," she answered, and

quickly turning to the old man, she said, "Grandfather, these gentlemen will help you."

"Thank you, gentlemen, I say. The Adelphi."

He could speak no more for a time, from coughing. He afterwards said he felt as cold as if his very blood had been chilled, though the air was only damp with a summer evening's dew, and freshened by an eastern breeze.

Just as the party were moving off, Mr. Carter-Striver came up, for he too had been dining in the Temple, though at the other Hall, and finding how matters stood, joined in the procession. Harry and Mr. Guffey supported the old man in silent sympathy, as he slowly moved forward, gasping for breath, and Mr. Carter-Striver escorted Mabel, while Death stalked on behind with his hour-glass on his head for a hat, as he mimicked the member of Parliament's dignified gait with grotesque exaggeration.

They found a cab just parting with a fare in Essex Street, and having quickly helped the Colonel into it, Mr. Carter-Striver directed the man to drive to Adelphi Terrace.

"Certainly, sir; hope you're well, sir?" said Mr. Pavey in reply.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Mr. Carter-Striver.

"It air," said Mr. Pavey.

"Well, have you found them yet?"

"One of 'em, sir, and we have hopes of one or two more."

"You're driving a four-wheeler now, I see."

"Hired, sir; the hansom's being done up."

"Take care of the old gentleman," said Mr. Carter-Striver, with a parting wave of the hand.

"I will," said the cabman with emphasis, and away he drove with a third whom he had not bargained for, sitting on the box too, and every now and then he held up his hour-glass to the Colonel, to show there was no mistake. How could there be a mistake with one so certain? And the sands were very low.

When the Colonel had been safely landed in his hall, Mabel asked the cabman to fetch Mrs. Pavey from Cook's Court.

"What name did you say, miss?" asked Cornelius.

"P-a-v-e-y, miss; a little woman with weak eyes and plenty to say for herself, eh?"

Mabel nodded, and the cabman quickly rejoined, "I'll fetch her, miss."

Cornelius Pavey standing on the doorstep, drew an extremely long breath, and mounted his box with extraordinary deliberation.

"The minute of great anticipations is a-coming to pass," said he. "Gently does it, Corney."

With this reflection, Mr. Pavey drove slowly into the Strand, and thence to the entrance of Cook's Court, where he left his cab in the care of a brother whip in the Strand, while he walked with increased deliberation up the court itself. Mr. Pavey was deeply impressed with the importance of the occasion, and his mind was much exercised touching how he should introduce himself. He had not approached a conclusion when he tapped at Mrs. Pavey's door.

Master Arthur Wellesley, with his mouth full of shrimps and bread-and-butter, answered the knock, and immediately thereafter retired into the room with "Mother, you're wanted."

"Pavey!"

Mr. Pavey bore this philosophically, and having drawn one of his business cards from his pocket, presented it to his wife, hat in hand with these memorable words, "The young lady's requested me to drive you to Adelphi Terrace in my cab, which is a-waitin' at the top of the court, 'cause the master's ill; and if you'll have the kindness to state when you'll be disengaged for the evening, I'll drive you home to that address, with as many of the fifteen as you can git together."

"No," said Mrs. Pavey with dignity, "I'll walk to Adelphi Terrace, and I'll ride in no cabs nowheres, 'cause I hates de*cei*vin' people." By which Mrs Pavey wished to convey that Mr. Pavey was a deceiver.

"Certainly," said Mr. Pavey rubbing his hat round; "you can do per*cise*ly as you please, Mary Jane, but—"

"Don't Mary Jane me; how do I know what you been a-doin' of all these years, and me a workin' myself to skin and bone for the children, and in horspitals and all?"

Mr. Pavey was very chapfallen, and rubbed

his hat all the more earnestly, as he responded while Mrs. Pavey donned her bonnet and shawl, "All I've got to say is this: I asked yer for to come and begin all over fresh; I left yer for the family good, and I've been a-lookin' for yer for the family good, but if you thinks it's for the family good to hold on slack continual*ly*, you'll hear no more from yours as ever, Cornelius P., *ex*ceptin' as you change your mind, and come and look me up, when you'll always find your place a-waitin' for yer at any moment, and me in the yard at four in the afternoon, to change horses."

"There, that's enough," said Mrs. Pavey; "and Arthur," she added, for Mr. Pavey's benefit, "lock the door on the inside, and don't let any one in but me and your brother. There," she said again to the humble Cornelius, "I don't want your cab; you may drive to Botany Bay, and that's the place you're fit for, a-leavin' your wife and children all these years."

She pranced by him like an angry duchess, and he meekly followed her down the stairs

and down the court, but he shambled ahead when they neared the Strand, and making for his cab, opened the door with, "This way, mum, if *you* please."

Mrs. Pavey was a woman, and the temptation to be driven in state, though only as far as the Adelphi, was, after all, irresistible. She reasoned in her justification, that if it had been any other cabman, she would not have hesitated in the slightest degree, and perhaps speed was all-important, so for the Colonel's sake she would ride.

During the journey she meditated on her husband's conduct, and cudgelled her brains for something exceedingly spiteful. Hers was a rare opportunity. Here was a pause in the conflict, answering to that five minutes after a wordy war, in which the brain is most fruitful of rejoinder, useless because it is postnate. So when Cornelius had knocked at the Colonel's door and had opened the cab, Mrs. Pavey turned on him with a scornful brow as she alighted, and said, "I suppose you're tired of her?"

"No, you're—"

"Oh! you villain," exclaimed the little woman, and dived into the house without another word. And as the humbled cabman drove away, he smacked his whip with vexation, as he exclaimed, "Why didn't I tell her I'd got number five at home?"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CARTER-STRIVER FESTIVAL.

As Harry walked to Mr. Guffey's chambers he reasoned with himself, and said, "Why does Mr. Carter-Striver choose to favour me?" For he did not know that Mr. Carter-Striver was a kind of social aeronaut, who would take any number of people up in his balloon, by way of ballast, to be dropped, as it suited his purpose, without the least warning, and, if possible, with less remorse. This was not the first time Harry had been so favoured by Mr. Carter-Striver. He had been thrice honoured with an invitation to the Carter-Striver mansion, and had before been dazzled by the burnished front of Admarine, Margaret Brandlebraine's little bridesmaid; whose golden hair had mellowed to a richer if less lustrous shade; whose eyes,

still near to each other, had grown keener; whose lips were thinner; whose face was more angular, with its square forehead and narrow chin; who had become not pretty, yet brilliant, nor tall, yet commanding: a vain woman, admired but unloved.

With a heart made sick by long-deferred hope, and greatly stirred by new ambitions, Harry coolly counted the cost and profit of a kind of social suicide. He had already formed an estimate of the value of show and swagger, and had put the figure high. In his eagerness to encompass the lengths of his ambition, he deemed his progress slow, and even his progress made him impatient of waiting; he therefore thought to marry Admarine. He thirsted for immediate profit, and the Carter-Striver glitter would surely help him thereto; accordingly, on the second of those three attendances at the Carter-Striver mansion, his speaking eyes looked on Admarine and puzzled her, and then retired within themselves and puzzled her still more. "Yes, he would marry her," he said to himself, and he said it despite the re-

collection of his earnest pleadings with Lucy, and despite his harsh denunciations of all who stood between them.

So Harry went up in the Carter-Striver balloon, and did not at all consider himself as ballast.

The Carter-Striver mansion was on the very edge of Portman Square, and the Carter-Strivers might have been regarded as the froth of the aristocratic residents of the Square itself. As the froth of the vulgar pewter strives to condense itself into the original malt and hop, so the Carter-Strivers made desperate efforts to resolve themselves into the upper ten; but the malt and hop in this instance was exceedingly full-bodied and full-measured too, and the froth was of necessity in constant danger of being toppled over with as little ceremony as Mr. Carter-Striver dropped his ballast.

As Mr. Guffey and Harry drove to the door of the Carter-Striver mansion, they were closely followed by Mr. Brian Roylstone in his private cab. Mr. Guffey hailed him with boisterous pleasure, and Harry with a distant bow, according

with the length of their acquaintanceship and a mutual feeling of aversion which had grown up between them upon very intelligible grounds. Brian Roylstone had a liking for Admarine, who did not appear to be ill-pleased with his attentions.

Abram Jenkins too was up behind the cab, bidding for recognition by indecorous leers; and when he found Harry did not look at him, his anger made him envious, and envy bold, so that he came down from his pedestal with a curse on pride.

"I 'spose you never knowd me," said he, as if addressing some one in mid air, while he held the horse's head. "I s'pose you was never at Aberglidd; oh, no!"

"What the deuce are you talking about?" said Brian, stepping from the cab.

"Him," said Abram, jerking his head in the direction of the door; "Willwend, the little'n."

"And what the deuce do you know of him?" asked Brian, affecting to be somewhat angry, but by no means loth to be informed.

"I s'pose you was take him for a gentle-

man," said Abram, with envy's substitute for contempt. "I s'pose he'll say he wasn't my father's 'prentice. I s'pose he'll say my father couldn't lock him up for running away. I s'pose he'll say he didn't run away 'cause I give him a clout in the ear for cheekin' me."

Abram Jenkins chucked up his chin as he said this, in evidence of his supreme disgust for fictitious gentlemen; and as he seemed to have exhausted his information, Brian advised him not to be so ready with his tongue, because in this instance he was assuredly wrong.

"Who says I'm wrong?" blurted Abram, defiant even of his master; but as Brian stopped in the act of raising his cigar to his mouth, and looked down upon him sternly, the look of surly envy on his face gave way to one of weak servility, and he turned away and said, "Well, it wasn't likely I could stand by now just and see my master took in."

"That's a proper feeling," said Brian; "but you must be careful what you say, for that gentleman's name is Wade, not Willwend."

"Of course he'd change his name," said the

groom, relapsing into his sour humour. "Why, if he hadn't, my father'd 'a found him out and locked 'im up for breaking his indentions."

There was something of chagrin, as well as gratification, in the laugh with which Brian turned on his heel. It was not altogether exhilarating to think he had been rivalled by one so mean as a gardener's runaway apprentice.

Meantime Harry was making his way round the drawing-room to Mrs. Carter-Striver, whose face shone forth a ruddy red over a robe of pink satin and gauze. Close beside her stood Mr. Merrington; and as Harry turned to him he caught a glimpse of Lucy, not far distant, and the glance was embarrassing to each. The old man hoped with all his soul the meeting boded no evil to his household; but Lucy cast her eyes on the ground and locked her clasped hands tighter; while Harry, eager in his new-found schemes, said to his heart that Lucy had renounced him, and swearing his conscience down, tried to be indifferent. Mr. Guffey came to his rescue with a slap on his back, and—

"Well, Merrington; you know Harry, eh? Altered since you last saw him, eh? I've been wanting to see you, Merrington, to give you some ideas about the spirit movement—most remarkable discovery; and I say, Mrs. Carter-Striver, do you think we could have a *séance* to-night in a quiet room?"

"Oh, I should be delighted, Mr. Guffey; it would be charming, for I and Admarine are dying to know what it's like. But, between you and I, Mr. Guffey, I believe it's all fudge."

"Not at all. My boy's a medium," said Mr. Guffey. "I expect him here about ten, and if agreeable, we'll have a thorough set-to."

"Oh, that'll be charming, I'm sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Carver-Striver, waving her fan, while Mr. Merrington looked on, smiling benevolently, and Harry moved away to Mr. Wigriff.

"Well, Mr. Wade," said the great man, "does your nature respond to this festive scene? Is it in unison with this light and joyous hour?"

"My heart, sir, beats to the music of success," said Harry, catching the great man's style.

"Good, my young friend, good; very well put, Mr. Wade. Success is indeed music; it is the sweetest music of the spheres, not our spheres, but the spheres of the universe; it is the finest tonic in the pharmacy of nature, to say nothing of the prescriptions of physicians. Why, Mr. Wade, success is the physic which the gods administer to its chosen ones. By the way, my young friend," continued the great man in his most amiable of humours, "I wish you success, you individually, personally, in your private concerns. I have just been informed by our mutual friend Mr. Carter-Striver that you are on your way to the Bar of your country. I wish you success, not only in your journey to the Bar, but in your more perilous flights beyond it. May you enjoy that music of which we have spoken; may the gods give you that tonic which we have extolled."

Harry thanked the great man with all his heart, but Mr. Wigriff's apparent ignorance of his intentions hitherto puzzled him. Perhaps Mr. Guffey was, after all, sole author of his *alias*. Should he then declare himself to Mr.

Wigriff, and with melodramatic action say, "My name is Willwend in the Temple Courts, though Wade in dull Blackfriars." He dared not venture to do so on the impulse of the moment, and so the opportunity passed as Mr. Wigriff continued in measured tones, "I'm especially glad to hear, Mr. Wade, that you intend prosecuting the study of the law as a profession for its own sake. It's so much more noble to pursue an object for its own sake; yes, for its *own* sake."

Mr. Wigriff turned the sentiment off, and gently waved it round and round and sent it floating through the room.

"As opposed to fancy barristers," suggested Harry.

"Ha! ha! very good, Mr. Wade, as opposed to fancy barristers, very good,—a very felicitous expression."

Harry had never seen the great man in so excellent a humour; should he venture on his declaration?

"Have you travelled much?" asked Mr. Wigriff.

Harry regretted his opportunitites for travel had been small.

"It is a matter for regret, I do assure you, Mr. Wade. The travelled man is a man of information and experience, he becomes personally acquainted with every subtilty of human nature, with a thoroughness which no course of literature, however ample, can approach, none, none. He learns man without a go-between; he is himself a book, himself a volume, of which there is no duplicate but that printed at the press of experience. But I wish you every success, my young friend, every success." With this the great man pressed Harry warmly by the hand, and moved away with stately tread to charm new listeners by his sounding platitudes. So Harry found himself shot off from these greater lights a wandering meteor, and in five minutes he was gaping in a corner with the disagreeable consciousness growing up within him that no one would miss him if he sank through the floor.

He sat within a pace or two of Mrs. Roylstone, whom, however, he recognized only as an

elderly matron, capable of a bold conception in drapery. Being in mourning she wore a white silk dress, the skirt whereof was gored and corded with black. But Harry passed her by to feast his eyes on Admarine flirting with Brian Roylstone, and a bitter feast it was. Still his eyes lingered there, and once he saw Admarine look towards him, and after a word or two Brian looked also; then the two laughed in concert with that cruel disregard for others' feelings, which successful passion breeds. Then Harry bowed his head, and strained his clasped hands round his knee, but the curse would out; and Mrs. Roylstone looked over her shoulder with a "heighho," and a grimace behind her fan. Not that she divined the cause of Harry's anger; she saw only an interesting young man, much moved; and, hoping for entertainment, beckoned Mr. Carter-Striver, and whispered, as she jerked her fan towards Harry,

"Just introduce me to that disconsolate youth, there's a dear man."

"With pleasure!" exclaimed Mr. Carter-Striver, instantly on the wing.

"Wait a moment, you excitable creature; sit here a minute and tell me who he is."

Mr. Carter-Striver obeyed in the matter of sitting, but on the second point pleaded inability.

"The fact is," said he, "I don't know. I've just been told that his parentage is rather questionable."

"What! was he a mistake?" exclaimed Mrs. Roylstone.

"Well, I believe so," answered Mr. Carter-Striver with some hesitation.

"How delightful, quite romantic! Bring him here, and let me have a talk with him. But wait a moment," pleaded the frolicsome dame, for Mr. Carter-Striver was again on the wing. "Can you tell me anything more about him: who were his parents; what their condition?"

Mr. Carter-Striver regretted his ignorance, so Mrs. Roylstone called him a provoking man, and ordered him away. The next moment Harry was introduced in due form, and at Mrs. Roylstone's invitation sat by her side.

"You must know, Mr. Wade," said the old lady, "that I always take pity on disconsolate people, and in nine cases out of ten I manage to talk the dumps out of them."

"Surely, madam, you don't think me disconsolate?"

"Oh, frightfully!" exclaimed Mrs. Roylstone. "Your appearance quite shocked me, and I said to Mr. Carter-Striver, 'Dear man, fetch me that youth, and let me talk the dumps out of him; so here we are.'"

With this Mrs. Roylstone fluttered her fan and looked Harry full in the face, with a whimsical expression of triumph. Harry returned the look for a moment and then fairly burst out laughing.

"Now," said Mrs. Roylstone, "tell me, what are you doing for the world?"

"I'm afraid the world is indebted but slightly to me," said Harry, with something of seriousness in his manner.

"More shame for you."

"How's that?" said Harry with surprise, "when every one tells me I have so much

to learn before I should attempt to teach others."

"Why, what in the world are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Roylstone. "Who said anything of teaching? I didn't, I'll swear! Now what," she continued, tapping him on the arm with her fan, "what do you think you were sent into the world for but to amuse us elderly people? And what have you done towards it? Really nothing, I'll be bound; I'm ashamed of you."

Harry was embarrassed, and had no answer, save to ask what could have been expected of him.

"Oh!" exclaimed his elderly companion, "what ignorance,—what shocking ignorance! I declare I never met with anything like it. Now, listen to me, Mr. Wade, don't you do as a great many persons are doing nowadays, don't trouble your head about the rising generation; the rising generation has done nothing for you, the declining generation has done a very great deal, so just set about returning thanks to the old people by giving them plenty of amusing things to talk about; give

them something in exchange for the pleasant world they're leaving you, and don't spoil it whatever you do."

Harry assured Mrs. Roylstone he had always had that in view.

"Had it in view, Mr. Wade," was the quick response. "Why, if you always keep it in view, you'll do nothing. Why, you're two-and-twenty now, I suppose, and haven't had one intrigue. Now I *dote* upon intrigue. It's really shameful to permit the world to grow rusty for dulness; and for my part, if you young people don't stir yourselves and play a few pranks, I shall see about getting out of the world as soon as possible, for I hate to see a good thing spoiled."

Here Mrs. Roylstone fluttered her fan as she looked about the room, and seemed to be in a thorough pet. Presently she said, "It isn't for the want of partners you go on in this dreadfully stupid way, Mr. Wade, because you have no need to go further than this room for everything that's charming. Look at that delightful girl yonder, little Miss Merrington.

Now, I'll be bound to say, you'd let her mope to death for want of a little healthy excitement."

"No, to that I can't plead guilty," said Harry with warmth.

"Ho! ho! then the world may hope for something yet,—there get along, Mr. Wade. Begin at once; don't wait a single moment. She's languishing for a companion, and I'll promise I won't embarrass you by looking."

The old lady fanned him away, laughing, and protesting by turns that the world would be worth living in yet.

So Harry was presently by Lucy's side, faltering that he had come at Mrs. Roylstone's bidding. Lucy did not answer, but still bent over a book of pictures. During the pause the old love throbbed again in both their hearts, and throbbing welled up full and fresh and flooded all their being with its glowing life.

And more, it burst through Harry's pride and purified his wild ambition; for the moment he was unconscious of himself, and

asked, "Would you prefer that I should leave you?"

"You know what I would prefer, Harry!" Lucy answered, still bound over her book; "and you know that what I would prefer for all time is not what is wise for this moment."

"Good-bye," said Harry, "think of me as coming nearer to you day by day."

"And you of me as ever praying for you," answered Lucy, still bent over her book.

And this was all that passed between them after their long parting; but though the time was short and their words were few, they lived an age—an age of love and hope, in those few moments.

As Harry turned away he saw Mr. Merrington talking with the man of commerce, and smiling ponderously with his head on one side, as he fumbled with his eye-glass. Mr. Wigriff was expressing his opinion on a rather dirty bank transaction which had come to light that day; some manager had disappeared and left his affairs far from straight. Said Mr. Wigriff with most effective modulation of

voice, "One is tempted, my dear sir, very much tempted to admire an exceedingly clever fraud."

Mr. Merrington shook his head, and laughingly dissented.

"Don't misunderstand me," added Mr. Wigriff, hastily raising his forefinger. "I refer to the conception only, not to the execution, and certainly not to the detection. A fraud which is made public has a common appearance, it has a vulgarly immoral, sneaking look about it; but the conception of a fraud placed before us as an example of ingenuity, — do you not think we might be pardoned if we admired it?"

Mr. Merrington was blind to the beauty of a fraudulent conception, but he didn't treat the matter seriously.

"Of course," said Mr. Wigriff, "it's somewhat absurd to imagine conception of fraud without execution, and so far I agree with you; but have you, sir, ever imagined the number of frauds in course of perpetration at this moment? Why, sir, their name must be legion."

"No doubt," said Mr. Merrington, "and such a thought is very distressing, very much so."

"No doubt," echoed Mr. Wigriff, "and the probability is that numbers of them are so cleverly contrived as to preclude detection."

"Do you really think so?" asked the clergyman in alarm; and Mr. Wigriff answered,

"I feel sure of it; at least, as sure as any man can feel of anything jealously concealed."

"Indeed," said Mr. Merrington, with emotion. "How very shocking!"

Then, after a decorous pause, Mr. Wigriff said, with a patronizing air, "Your young friend, Mr. Wade, seems to be making satisfactory progress."

"Mr. Wade, sir, did you say? I don't think I know him."

"I thought he spoke to you just now," said the man of commerce. "He's now leaning against the mantelpiece talking to a young lady."

"Dear me," said Mr. Merrington, eyeing Harry through his glass. "That's Mr. Willwend, not 'Wade.'"

"Surely not," protested Mr. Wigriff.

"Oh, I'm convinced of it," said the other. "I've known him since he was a mere boy; in fact he was brought to me a day or two after he was picked up in the street; and, to tell you the truth, I was rather surprised to find him in such company as this."

"You astonish me," exclaimed Mr. Wigriff. "That young man is employed in the office of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company in, I may say, a responsible position, and you tell me his name is not Wade, but Wilter, or Wilbend,—what did you say?"

"Willwend, sir," and Mr. Merrington spelled it, and Mr. Wigriff with much apparent concern made a note of it.

"Dear me," said the great man, putting up his note-book, "to think of our having lighted on a fraud here."

"A fraud you say, sir?"

"Ay, a fraud, sir. I'm very much afraid we have discovered the clue to a deep-laid plot. That young man came to me with excellent recommendations, most excellent;

but I remember they were all written, and most probably forgeries. In fact, I have no doubt they were forgeries, for, exercising a generous confidence, which, speaking purely as a man of business, I regret I am too prone to, I never made a single inquiry, and accepted the youth as honest to the backbone. But, sir, what can be the character of a young man with an *alias?* Why, sir, he has no character, and the presumption is he never had one worth keeping. I trust he's not robbing us."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Merrington, but in his conscience he was bound to confess he was not very sorry.

Mr. Wigriff folded his arms on his breast, and swelled with virtuous indignation. Nothing, he assured Mr. Merrington, but respect for Mr. Carter-Striver prevented him from denouncing the youthful impostor on the spot; and Mr. Merrington shook his head with sincere regret, as he traced the whole calamity to original sin.

But both indignation and moralizing were put an end to by the appearance of a footman,

with information that a young woman, who declined to state either her name or business, waited for Mr. Wigriff in the hall. Mr. Wigriff received the message with horror, and declined to attend to the summons; but the footman said they had been unable to induce the young woman to go away, and as she seemed respectable, and pleaded so hard for the sake of her grandfather, who was dying, they had relented and resolved to lay the matter before Mr. Wigriff. The great man immediately relented also, and, turning to Mr. Merrington as he followed the footman, said, "A poor man to whom I have given an alms. You will excuse me while I go to perform a melancholy duty."

Mr. Merrington bowed assent, and the next moment Mr. Wigriff was listening to Mabel Willwend's story.

"And what ails your grandfather?" asked Mr. Wigriff, with a rich growth of sympathy in his voice.

Mabel said she could not tell, but that his breath came short and quick. "And he con-

tinually asks for you, sir," she said, with trouble in her eyes.

"Indeed, indeed, then he shall not ask in vain;" the great man sighed as if he revelled in self-abnegation. "And how did your grandfather become ill?"

"He insisted on going out to search for Harry."

"My dear young lady," exclaimed Mr. Wigriff, "pray do not speak so loud,—not quite so loud. This is not my house, you know," he remonstrated. "Now let me hear how it happened."

So Mabel moderated her voice to a whisper as she told of her grandfather's failure of strength in the Temple, of the courteous help given them by three strange gentlemen, of their safe arrival home, and of the old man's alarming condition since.

"We laid him on his little bed," she said, "thinking it would please him, and for an hour he remained exhausted and almost insensible; but when by rest and stimulants he revived, he continued asking for Harry and for

you by turns, so I set out to seek you in the hope that you would come to him."

"Yes, yes, my dear young lady; yes, yes, I will certainly come. Let me see, it is late now," pursued the great man, examining his massive gold watch. "It is late; what time, now, could I come in the morning,—how early?"

"Cannot you come now, sir?" pleaded Mabel.

"I'm afraid not; I'm very much afraid not," said the great man, answering Mabel's look of timid supplication by a solemn shake of the head. "Will seven o'clock be too early, or six, or five?"

"No time will be too early," said Mabel eagerly. "I *wish* you could come now."

And she bit her lip and bowed her head, and a single tear fell upon the pavement of the hall.

"I wish I could," said Mr. Wigriff, still, to all appearance, absently pondering over his watch in utter ignorance of her emotion. But he told her it was impossible; and muttering

something about his present business, a consultation an hour hence, and his numerous engagements, he promised to be with her grandfather at six in the morning; to all of which Mabel said "Amen" for very weariness, and stifling her disappointment she took new courage for new trials.

Mr. Wigriff parted from Mabel at the hall-door with a profusion of sympathetic hopes and regrets, and as he walked back to the drawing-room, he stroked his chin with a whimsical chuckle, and said, with infinite gratification, "Now, if I was a commonplace person I should say, 'Dear me, how things do come about!'" Mr. Wigriff, pursuing the reflection, observed to himself that of course things came about, and that in this particular instance the results had naturally followed from the first great cause, that Abel Violet Wigriff was not a commonplace person. And this remarkable man chuckled again as he surveyed the distinguished company, and imagined the excitement he could produce by the recital of a few domestic facts.

The distinguished company, however, was not favoured with any such recital; and as the evening waned, it dispersed whither its several members listed, to a ball, a late reception, the fag end of the opera, or perhaps to bed. But a few still lingered; my Lord Berrypurt engaged Mr. Carter-Striver on the subject of colonization, and its effects on trade, and Mr. Roylstone and the Earl Mendroight, discussing the evolutions of the spheres, revolved round each other by way of illustration. Presently, however, they became conscious they were alone; whereupon Mr. Roylstone inquired for Mrs. Roylstone, and my Lord Berrypurt asked for the lady of the house. The next moment a decidedly hysterical scream drew them in haste to the library, where they found a section of the company, including the two ladies sought for, and Admarine, Mr. Wigriff, Brian and Harry, hovering round Master Bustin. Urged on by his master, he had just succeeded in bringing on the scene the ghost of the maternal grandfather of Miss Admarine, who accordingly screamed. It was past midnight; the room

was slightly darkened, and this highly excited party was inclined to be superstitious; so when Mrs. Carter-Striver said, "Ask if my dear ma's here," those present were prepared to see the dear departed declare herself at once. Master Bustin, however, had never been known to hurry, and now that he found himself in the prominent position of a medium in one of the houses of the great, with the great actually waiting on his every utterance, he was inclined to bet yrannous in the matter of deliberation and formula.

"Ask for Mrs. Striver?" said Mr. Guffey.

"Shoer, yes," said the boy, who immediately required every one present to fix their eyes on the centre of the table round which half-a-dozen of them sat in company with him and Mr. Guffey.

When Master Bustin had thus secured perfect silence, and reduced the ladies to a state of nervous excitement, he called out, "Is Mrs. Striver among the good spirits here present?"

Three raps followed, which every one knew meant "Yes," and the boy again called out,

"Has the good spirit got anything to say for herself?"

After a considerable pause, during which Master Bustin appeared more stolid than ever, the company was obliged with an affirmative answer; and Mr. Guffey, who acted as showman, called on Mrs. Roylstone to point to the letters of the alphabet in their order. Thus assisted the spirit rapped out, "Shoer, Mary, I loves yer still."

"Oh," screamed Mrs. Carter-Striver, "her very words I do declare."

But Mr. Carter-Striver, more anxious for the credit of the family, challenged the grammar of the communication, and denied that his respected mother-in-law could possibly be its author. Mr. Guffey entered upon an elaborate argument to show that communications were always adulterated in their passage through the medium; Master Bustin, dimly comprehending that the argument was on the side of the spirits, said, "Shoer, yes;" and a continuous rapping put an end to the controversy. On this Master Bustin drew the company's

attention to the alphabet, and to the unbounded admiration of a wondering audience the rapper spelled out, "G double o—d b—y."

This communication affected Mrs. Carter-Striver to tears, a result which Master Bustin regarded with grim satisfaction, and which incited him to a further exhibition of his marvellous powers. Accordingly, without any preface beyond casting his malevolent eye on the alphabet, he called, "*Is* there any more good spirits here present?"

The company was all attention, but no answer came. Master Bustin, in no wise abashed, raised his head, favoured each person present with a stolid look, and invoked the spirits a second time in precisely similar terms. A volley of raps came and every eye was on the alphabet.

W—i—l—w—e—n—d spelt the raps, and half-a-dozen persons were immediately in a fluster of excitement, including Master Bustin, whose exultation almost appeared in his face when he saw how terribly Harry was moved. But this was not all; Mrs. Roylstone cried, "Oh

God; it's the Colonel;" her husband remonstrated, "My dear!" Mr. Guffey with scientific enthusiasm exclaimed, "Capital!" and Mr. Wigriff looked at his watch with a start. It was nearly two. "Will the good spirit give a name?" called Master Bustin; and immediately the raps produced, "Kernolel Wilwend." "Will the good spirit tell us what he's got to say for hisself?" A volley of raps declared at once the spirit's willingness and impatience; so Master Bustin urged Mrs. Roylstone to haste with: "Now then, ma'am, look sharp; he's in a hurry sure*ly*."

Mrs. Roylstone was at once upon the alert, and the raps produced, "We shal never met agin, corse you are wiked." Then came a rap-a-rap-rap-rap, which Master Bustin interpreted by saying, "The good spirit's in a precious way with some of yer;" a view of the case which Mr. Guffey with much emphasis confirmed.

The communication produced a profound sensation among those who had before exhibited symptoms of alarm; indeed, Mr. Wigriff hurried from the room and from the house

without saying a word to any one. Mrs. Roylstone eagerly inquired to whom the spirit referred, and despite Mr. Roylstone's remonstrances Master Bustin called aloud, "Will the good spirit say what party he means?"

"My boy," was the answer; "he is a devel."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Mr. Guffey in an ecstasy of delight, but the communication seemed only to increase Mrs. Roylstone's bewilderment.

"But did he ever have a son?" she asked.

"Of course he did," said Master Bustin contemptuously, "else he wouldn't send a message to him."

Master Bustin then called on the spirit to say where his delinquent son was to be found that the message might be transmitted.

"At the table," was the answer; and as the company was generally under the impression that no one of that name was present, Master Bustin was in danger of being ejected as an impostor, but he maintained his position by the assistance of Mr. Guffey, who asked Mrs.

Roylstone to place her hand on the shoulder of each gentleman in succession, while Master Bustin called on the spirit to declare whether the one touched was his son. Harry's turn came in due course, and the triple raps denounced him as wicked and a devil.

"There," said Master Bustin, doubly triumphant in Harry's discomfiture. Harry was discomfited indeed; and so was Mr. Roylstone at the strange inquiring look with which the old lady and Harry met each other.

"Is your name Willwend?" she asked.

"My dear, my dear," said Mr. Roylstone, hastily coming to her side, "it's time we left? Come!"

"I should be sorry to cause you to delay," said Harry, almost rudely stopping them; "but if you know anything of my father, whom I have *never* known, for God's sake tell me of him?"

"We know nothing of him, I assure you," said Mr. Roylstone. "Nothing whatever. Besides your name is Wade, and not Willwend."

"No, sir; my name is Willwend, and not Wade," said Harry, following them out of the room; "if you will allow me—"

A series of nods and winks from Mrs. Royl-stone caused him suddenly to stop, and he retired in the hope of gaining a fitter opportunity for explanation.

So the party broke up with an incomprehensible feeling; none the less unpleasant, because it was incomprehensible.

CHAPTER XX.

THE COLONEL ON THE LAST MARCH.

Mr. Wigriff fled from the Carter-Striver mansion with undignified haste, and strode through Portman Square as if Master Bustin's most familiar spirit had been close at his heels; but the heat which comes of exertion and flying coat-tails met the intensity of his purpose and enforced an abatement of speed; indeed, he came to a dead stop in Oxford Street, wiped his forehead, and resolved to hail a cab. He had not long to wait before his ears were greeted by the monotonous shambling of an ancient horse drawing a most uncertain cab, and a driver past all time but the night-time. The whole scene was made ghostly by the first grey glimmering of dawn, and the cabman seemed making the best of his way out of the world.

Undeterred by the odour of decay which burst upon him as he stepped into the cab,—the fruits of damp and dirt sown by a thousand grimy fares,—Mr. Wigriff wiped his forehead again, drew his coat-tails around his knees, and, giving himself up to contemplation, was rapt in thought all the way to the Strand.

Dismissing the cab at the entrance to the Adelphi, Mr. Wigriff winked and blinked and stamped and shook himself as he walked towards the river, for the hazy morning confused his sense of sight, and he knew his face looked aged and worn and was tinged with a sickly purple tint. When he came to the Terrace itself, he stopped and combed his hair and diligently rubbed his face with his handkerchief. Then he spread the handkerchief on Colonel Willwend's doorstep, and sitting down was lost in thought again.

And up in the topmost room Mabel Willwend watched by her grandfather, lying on his little bed within the tent; and as he lay his hands worked to and fro, and as they moved he moaned. So she had watched by him all the

weary night alone; so had his hands worked to and fro; and so through the weary hours had he moaned. Now she fanned him with an old black fan; now wiped the sweat from off his brow, or tried to still his restless hands; and when the friendly voices of the City chimes told out the hour, she gave him a soothing draught Levant had left her. Sometimes the potion lent the old man rest; then Mabel would go to the window, and, longing for the morning, would idly watch for a shooting star or note the glistening of the moonlight on the river. Once she dreamt of the future, and fondly pictured the old man hale again, with Harry leading him in a shady grove such as she had read of but had never seen. But persistently among her thoughts came fears of dire evil: with Margaret hopeless and the Colonel dead, Wigriff became a very dragon in her imaginings, and she ran to assure herself the old man was not dead already. The next moment she lay at his feet, seeking relief in tears and the sighings of unutterable prayer; for the restless spirit still strove with the feeble

frame; the old man's hands still laboured to and fro, and still as they moved he moaned. Presently she grew calm again, and sat herself to read; so pronouncing the words, that she might not fall asleep, she whispered softly and took comfort:

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Even to this patient one the hours of her night of watching passed as days and weeks and months, and to another would have been as a lifetime; still she never thought she acted nobly, or was sacrificing aught for love, as hour by hour she went her weary round, and hour by hour longed for the coming day.

At length, when each moment of time had been measured to the full, the candle burning dimly by the old man's side met the dawning with its feeble rays; then Mabel thanked God for the coming day and went to look upon it.

The strange grey light which closely follows on the dawn, and seems to clothe each object in the sleeping City as with a halo, was for the moment tinting the river-banks and bridges with its ethereal hoar frost, and making the river run a flood of liquid opal; and although it made Mr. Wigriff, sitting on the doorstep, look purple and worn, it lit up Mabel's face with a new grace; for if her eyes were heavy with watching, they were made beautiful by the glimmering of hope revived; and if her cheeks were pale, her lips were girt with pensiveness, and enduring patience was written on her front.

Mabel opened the window a little, and Mr. Wigriff started to his feet at the sound.

"A watcher, a watcher with the dead," said the great man, peering up at the window. "I'll ring the bell and then walk in as usual. Yes, yes."

The great man took a turn or two on the pavement before carrying out his resolution; then he gently rang the bell and opened the door with much deliberation. He met Mabel

standing on the staircase with her finger on her lips, and interpreting her attitude as signifying that her grandfather was dead, he pursed up his lips and cast up his eyes as he approached her in silence. Then she told him the Colonel had just fallen into a fitful sleep, and she begged him to be careful not to awaken him. Mr. Wigriff frowned as he followed Mabel upstairs, and he frowned again as he heard the old man faintly calling from his tent. Mabel ran on in advance, and Mr. Wigriff fetched up a patronizing smile as he looked in upon her stroking the old man's hand.

"Wigriff," said the Colonel faintly; "Wigriff, I say, I'm going fast; but I've done my duty—I say, my duty."

"I'm truly sorry to see you so depressed, Colonel; but perchance the revolving seasons will restore your wonted health."

Mr. Wigriff's voice sounded very full and rich, and he had brought himself up at the doorway of the tent, with his hand hanging in his waistcoat in quite a statuesque attitude.

"I'm on the last march, Wigriff; the very

last march, I say. We shall come to a halt soon."

"No, no, Colonel; we'll take easy stages."

The old man shook his head, and turning to Mabel, still stroking his chilling hands, he said, "Poor Mabel; she will be alone, alone."

Then he closed his eyes; but he muttered still, "alone, alone;" and presently he turned to her beseechingly with "God forgive me for keeping you shut up; and you forgive me."

The young girl pressed the old man's hand, and smoothing his pillow, whispered comfort in his ear; but her eye was on Wigriff and her manner was constrained.

"I thought to keep her from the world, Wigriff," said the old man, "because I feared the world would use her ill; but now she will be alone. Oh, God help us."

"Not quite alone," intoned the man of law from the doorway.

"Ah, thank you, Wigriff, thank you; but you have other cares. No sign of Harry yet, eh, Wigriff?"

"I'm afraid we've little chance of bringing

the prodigal home," said Mr. Wigriff, with a remarkably healthy sigh; and he put his hand upon his heart and looked heavenward.

"Try and find him, Wigriff, for Mabel's sake, if no longer for mine, or Mabel will be alone; I say—alone. Oh, God, she is alone already!... What was that? A strange tremor passed through me from head to foot. Wait; I cannot see or hear. Give me your hand, Mabel. So let it rest awhile; the world has faded, and I'm being closed in all around with heavy shadows that may be felt. Have you my hand still, Mabel? Keep by me yet a little while, and place your other hand upon my forehead. My limbs grow numb and numb—"

The weak voice grew fainter and still fainter; but though his speech had ceased to be intelligible, his lips still moved, and now and then faint murmurs fell on Mabel's anxious ear. Soon these also ceased, but Mabel still waited on the old man's every breath, fearful to lose the lightest whisper, should it come. As she bent over him, her eyes were still turned full

upon Wigriff, and some growing resolution seemed to stay her grief; for, save that now and then a solitary tear would burn its way upon her cheek, she did not even weep, but almost frowned. Presently a whisper came; and Mabel felt that Wigriff was stooping by her side, with his neck craned over and his hand to his ear, as the words slowly broke from the old man's lips: "Oh, God, pray find a better guardian and guide for this dear child than I have been, and ever bless her with Thy care."

The lips moved twice or thrice again, and then all motion, save a fitful breathing, ceased. Soon the dreadful stillness was not broken even by this, and in a little while the old man was at rest.

Then Mabel rose, and turning to Wigriff pointed to the doorway of the tent. The great man, though loth to acknowledge it even to himself, was becoming overawed by Mabel's manner; he hesitated only an instant, then made a solemn bow, and preceding her through the opening waited as she let the

curtain fall closing the tent. Then Mabel turned to him again, and pointing to the doorway of the room said, with surprising firmness, "I'm not afraid to be alone."

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Wigriff, recovering all his former confidence at the sound of Mabel's voice, "I could not think of leaving you, — pray consider my time as yours."

Mabel retreated a step or two, and holding the curtain of the tent down firmly with her hands, she waited as one at bay. Mr. Wigriff advanced towards her, shaking his head profoundly, and said in full rich tones, as if he revelled in the very luxury of woe:

"Forgive me if I remind you, my dear young friend, that many duties have to be performed in connection with the deceased which will of necessity be painful to you. Strangers will come and go in this house, and I am moved to invite you to entrust me with the management of these affairs, while you seek an asylum at my hands, and become the guest of my dear wife and sister for a few days."

Mr. Wigriff assumed a humble posture, he clasped his hands and bowed as he waited for a reply, but Mabel only shook her head, and kept her eyes fixed upon the door, save just one hurried glance of fearful pleading involuntarily thrown towards Wigriff.

"What, then, do you propose?" he asked with dignity.

"I have friends who will care for me;" said Mabel, watching his tone, but her lip quivered with the effort, and a tear trickled down her cheek.

"Then if you are cared for yourself, my dear young friend, it is only necessary for me to attend to the business affairs of the deceased, and take charge of his papers."

"I will take charge of them myself," said Mabel firmly.

"Impossible," said Mr. Wigriff, "his affairs were complicated; only the legal mind could follow them. Besides, my dear young lady, his papers may contain documents, the importance of which it will be impossible for you to discern; some of them may be of great value,

and almost all of them beyond your powers of judgment. Good gracious me, my dear young friend, you must not think of flying in the face of the law."

Mabel's resolution wavered, but she still held the curtain of the tent, and frowning down all signs of weakness, kept her eyes fixed on the doorway.

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Wigriff, solemnly, with outspread hands, "be advised by the most trusted friend of your deceased grandfather, and carry out his wishes by placing yourself under my guardianship until we know by his last will and testament, if he has made one, on whom he has imposed that pleasing duty."

Mabel simply shuddered; so after a pause Mr. Wigriff continued, "If you decline to be advised by me, and refuse my offers of assistance, I must act simply as the legal adviser of the deceased, and seal his drawers and other receptacles, until their contents can be handed over in due form to his heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns whosoever they may be."

So saying Mr. Wigriff brought his hands with a flourish under his coat tails, and put on an expression of importance. Mabel, in her innocence, asked what he meant by sealing drawers, whereupon Mr. Wigriff answered in a soothing voice. "There now, you see how very deficient you are in knowledge of what is necessary to be done. The drawers of a deceased person are always sealed, that unauthorized persons may not tamper with his papers. Come, my dear young friend, let us perform this melancholy duty at once."

Saying this he put his hand upon Mabel's shoulder, as if urging her to re-enter the tent.

"Let us wait," said Mabel, "till Mrs. Pavey comes."

Mr. Wigriff was shocked to hear himself placed in competition with a charwoman, but he simply took Mabel by the hand, and, as if profoundly sympathetic, said, "My dear child, this excessive nervousness on your part makes me think you ill; I cannot feel offended at what from another I should take as an insult, because I appreciate the trying circumstances

in which you have been and are placed. But really, my dear young lady, you must try to cultivate a reasonable frame of mind; you must—"

Mrs. Pavey's ring, an hour before the usual time, interrupted Mr. Wigriff, and obliged him to accompany Mabel downstairs to let the old woman in.

"Oh, lawks, dear lamb, you don't mean to say it's come so soon," cried Mrs. Pavey, and Mabel straightway fell upon her neck and sobbed again. Mrs. Pavey tried to comfort her, but it was a miserable attempt, and very soon her own face puckered up for sympathy, and the two sobbed in unison, much to the discomfort of Mr. Wigriff, who walked the hall and blew his nose, and gave several other indications of his presence. But what troubled him most was a temptation to run upstairs and ransack the Colonel's drawers; and there was little doubt but what he would have given way, if a ring and a double knock had not startled the trio into propriety, and introduced Mr. Levant.

Mabel's tears were dried in a moment; Levant's coming was what she had hoped for, and now she knew was the time to meet Wigriff. Standing beside the body of her grandfather, whither Wigriff did not dare intrude, she said to Levant, with her face turned away both from him and the grim profile showing through the sheet, "Your past kindness emboldens me to ask your advice."

"Nothing would please me better than to serve you," said Levant, and his eye glistened as if in anticipation of a rare pleasure.

Mabel sighed deeply, as she answered, "Mr. Wigriff insists on taking charge of grandfather's papers, and nothing, I fear, will turn him from his purpose of, at least, sealing these drawers."

"Let him seal them," said Levant. "Let him seal anything he likes; we'll settle a week hence who shall break the seals."

"One thing more," said Mabel, as Levant was leaving the tent. "May I send for you if I am in any difficulty? I have no friends," she added, with a failing voice.

Levant turned and pressed her hand as he said, "I'll come without being sent for, if you'll let me, every day."

Mabel's tears flowed fast as she came from the tent; now that she had some one on whom to lean in this time of trial, she could only weep.

In a very short time after this, Mr. Wigriff was down on his knees dabbling the Colonel's old escritoire all over with sealing-wax and red tape; and after him came the rest of the horrid troop that gleans where Death puts in his sickle. There was something terribly strange about the Colonel's face when they had laid him in his last home. Girt by the paltry dressings of the coffin, with their fancy edgings, his face stood out fearfully firm and resolute. Now that his eye was closed, and motion had left him, the later weakness of his mind, so often betrayed by his uncertain eye, and the puny passion that had trembled round his lip at times, had given place to the one expression of simple firmness resting on his lower features.

CHAPTER XXI.

A COUNCIL OF TWO.

Harry Willwend strode from the Carter-Striver mansion as wildly in his way as Mr. Wigriff. What with ruby wines and rare Moselle, gay rooms all glittering with crystal and gilt, the hurly-burly of ceaseless conversation still ringing in his ears, the brightness of rich toilets still dazzling his eyes, and the witchery of the thousand evanescent charms with which wealth invests society, still holding him in bondage; what with all this, heightened, strengthened, and transformed into a whirlwind of thought by the closing incidents of the evening, Harry's brain was on fire, and he almost leapt upon his way.

The little book-shop in Drury Lane was shut by the time he came to it, and very mean

it looked, with its low front, its badly-fitting and worn shutters, and the rickety contrivance, resembling a horse-trough, in which the books were arranged by day. But there were other shops in the Lane manufactured by time, after the same pattern, and if Julian Leep's had not been so very low, it would have been worthy of honourable mention, at least on account of its good state of preservation.

Julian always chose to sit up for Harry on such occasions as this, that he might have an account of the evening from Harry's lips before his fervour cooled, and this was a great occasion indeed.

"I am afraid I am late," said Harry, as the old man opened the door, and lighted the way by the candle held above his head.

"Nay, but we're early; it's yet twilight, and the way is long, and we haven't a carriage to rattle us home withal."

"Ah, you're very good to me, Father Leep, especially in this sort of thing."

"Then give me honourable return therefor. Pay me in kind by giving me food for dreams.

Tell me of the rare and noble company. Come," said the old man, sitting on the edge of his Windsor chair; "were they generous with their compliments, and gifted in the art of bowing?"

"Pretty well," said Harry; "but I've got a regular melodrama for you to-night."

"No," said Julian.

"I've met with an elderly lady who seems to know something of my father."

"Eh," murmured the old man, with just a suspicion of regret in his voice, for the time had come when he would prefer to keep Harry to himself. He had imagined a great future for him, and no longer hoped for any one to come between them to share the honour of making the success.

Harry, however, quite unsuspectingly narrated the crowning incident of the evening with a fervour which clearly showed to what his hopes pointed. First he told how he was introduced to Mrs. Roylstone, a grand old lady with a wicked twinkle in her eye; how later Mr. Guffey, who had become deeply interested

in spiritual manifestations, introduced Master Bustin to a select company as a medium of rare qualities; and how Master Bustin favoured the company with communications from various deceased persons, and among others from one Willwend, who," said Harry, "announced himself as my father."

"Well," said Julian, much relieved, "and what of that, my most persistent of hopers?"

"Nothing," said Harry, "that's the folly of the incident. Now I come to the matter of moment."

"Good," said Julian.

"Immediately," continued Harry, "the spirit of the name of Willwend was announced, and it was a Colonel Willwend, Mrs. Royl-stone became extremely excited; she waited eagerly for more information, and when a message came for Colonel Willwend's son, she questioned whether he ever had one, and would not be satisfied until the medium, that young imp Bustin, indicated me as the son, and it came out that my name was not Wade, but Willwend."

"Ah!" exclaimed Julian; and Harry, defining his meaning, struck in, with off-hand confidence,—

"Oh, I shall be done with that name tomorrow. I mean to tell Mr. Wigriff that an *alias* is repugnant to my feelings, and that I prefer to abide by the consequences of wearing my own name."

Julian nodded, and Harry went on to describe how he pressed Mrs. Roylstone for information, but that Mr. Roylstone, whose associations with the name of Willwend seemed to be very unpleasant, interposed and carried his wife off in the rudest manner.

"Now," said Harry, "setting the spiritual manifestation aside, we have a lady betrayed into exhibiting extreme interest at the mere mention of the name 'Willwend.' What does that convey?"

"That she has known a person of the name of Willwend," was the answer.

"Nothing more!" exclaimed Harry; "don't you think she must know a great deal of this person of the name of Willwend?"

"She may know everything about him from the day of his birth to the day of his death; but it doesn't follow that a single incident of his life concerns you, or that you are connected with this person of the name of Willwend by any tie whatever."

"No, but I may be," said Harry gravely.

"You may be," responded Julian.

Harry thought that was little enough ground for hope, and looked at his boots very moodily for a moment or two. Then he brightened up as he told how Mrs. Roylstone seemed to invite him to seek an opportunity for a future interview. Julian doubted this; but being assured by Harry in the most positive manner that there could really be no kind of doubt about it, he gave in, and recommended Harry to see Mrs. Roylstone as soon as possible.

This settled, the two relapsed into silence; Harry to imagine the form of his interview with Mrs. Roylstone, and the nature of her knowledge concerning his father; Julian to put himself through a severe cross-examination

touching the cause and justness of his objection to Harry's finding friends at the eleventh hour. Harry's cogitation naturally resulted in the killing of the fatted calf as the proper supplement to the discovery of something in the nature of a mole on his left arm; Julian Leep and Mrs. Roylstone of course occupied prominent positions at the joyful board, and Mr. Merrington could be descried in the distance, doing penance on his knees. The rest of the picture was somewhat hazy, but even the very haze was rose-colour.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. WIGRIFF COMMENCES THE ATTACK.

HARRY wended his way to the office of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company next morning in a hopeful frame of mind, and with two purposes in hand. Mr. Wigriff was to be told, in the plainest possible manner, that he intended to resume his own name for the future, and an opportunity was to be made for seeing Mrs. Roylstone. Appropriate and telling declarations were composed for each event.

But unfortunately for his peace of mind, the carrying out of these purposes largely depended upon circumstances which he could not control. A long day and an anxious night made Mr. Wigriff late in finding his way to the office of the Company, and it was four o'clock in the afternoon before his lissom

step was heard upon the stairs; but his smile was as bland as ever, and neither his garments nor his countenance bore any traces of the trials of the night.

Harry was soon in attendance in the board-room, where it was Mr. Wigriff's custom to receive him. He bore the letters of the day in one hand, with the answers he had written to them, and in the other a little pile of money upon an open cash-book. He reasoned that the lateness of the hour would prevent him from making his declaration until the letters had been signed and dispatched, and that it would be better if the routine business of the day was first disposed of. Meantime he congratulated himself that Mr. Wigriff was in an exceedingly good humour.

"Ha-ah, money!" exclaimed the great man; "more money, that's the result of the dividend. Somebody else would like two per cent., eh? Cash, my young friend, hard unmistakable cash is the only trustworthy criterion of success, the only reliable thermometer in the atmosphere of profit and loss.

Estimates and valuations are all very well, but show me your banker's book when all your debts are paid, and I'll tell you what profit you've made."

Having delivered this commercial maxim, Mr. Wigriff fell upon the letter, read Harry's answers with a sonorous voice, complimented his young friend on one or two of them, signed them all, and handed them over for the post. During Harry's absence seeing to their dispatch, he examined the cash-book. It was simply a book of receipts, in which Harry made entries of all moneys he received on one page, and on the other Mr. Wigriff signed his name against each entry, to show that the item had been handed over to him. The money Harry had brought in represented three items unsigned for, and they were written on the top lines of a new page. The last two items on the preceding page amounted to £36, and it was to these that Mr. Wigriff paid particular attention. First, he examined the whole page minutely, then gave a sober couple of minutes to the last two items, with an occasional glance

over leaf at the fresh entries, smiled malevolently, and finally fetched up an angry and forbidding expression of countenance, so that by the time Harry returned he had to all appearance been worked into a towering passion. As Harry entered, Mr. Wigriff brought himself up near the cash-book, for he had commenced pacing the room in the most violent manner, and indignantly exclaimed, "Have the goodness, young man, to give your attention to those two last signatures."

Harry complied, and waited for the next demonstration, which he precipitated by an inquiring, "Well, sir?"

"Well, sir," repeated Mr. Wigriff, "those signatures are forgeries, and how comes it that they are so, eh, sir?"

"I don't think they are forgeries," Harry stammered, considerably confused. "I think I saw you write them when you received the money."

"Think!" cried Mr. Wigriff; "we must have no thinking in such a case. Has this book been out of your possession, pray?"

"No, sir," said Harry emphatically.

"Then, I repeat," said Mr. Wigriff, with dignity, "those signatures are forgeries; and I regret to say, young man, there is only one person who could have forged them, and only one person who could gain anything by doing so."

"Do you mean that you suspect me, sir?" inquired Harry excitedly.

"Whom should I suspect?" exclaimed Mr. Wigriff, growing calmer as Harry's passion was aroused. "Here is a young man in whom every confidence is reposed, the sole recipient of cash for which I am responsible, in possession of receipts, which I have never signed, for money, which I have never received. What is the natural, the melancholy conclusion to be drawn from those facts?"

"But, I repeat," exclaimed Harry, dashing the book upon the table, "I saw you write those signatures when I paid you the money."

Mr. Wigriff answered in tones of the deepest compassion, "Far be it from me, young man, to bandy words about such a serious matter as

this,—serious, not as regards the paltry sum of which you have defrauded me,—me, I say, for it is me, your would-be benefactor, and not the Company you have defrauded—"

"I have defrauded no one," broke in Harry.

"Now, don't be so misguided as to compel me by denial to resort to extreme measures. Although I am angry with myself for having permitted such a thing as this to occur by reposing too great confidence in one whom I had taken so few steps to assure myself he was trustworthy, for you, young man, I feel *nothing* but compassion."

"Your compassion is offensive, sir, while you continue to suspect me," said Harry, with a quivering lip.

"Now be advised, young man, and do not persist in denial. Your scheme is too apparent, your design too obvious. If you had been dealing with an ordinary man, you might have rested secure in the hope that he would not turn back to examine the entries on the previous page—"

Harry started, and took a rapid look at the book.

"Oh, I admit," pursued Mr. Wigriff, with consummate calmness, "the temptation was great, the opportunity in most respects well chosen; but it's a very foolish act, young man, a very foolish act. How much better would it have been to have directed this talent you evince for design in some legitimate sphere?"

Mr. Wigriff shook his head in a melancholy manner, and Harry exclaimed, beside himself with passion, "I tell you I deny it entirely, and I shall secure a witness to your calumnious language."

With this he opened the door, but Mr. Wigriff advanced and closed it as he siad, rapidly and earnestly, "Don't be rash, young man. I advise you to consider your position. The case is too strong against you to allow of your taking this high-handed course. I grieve to say that I accidentally heard last night that you have entered the service of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company under an assumed name, no doubt with the distinct intention of committing this fraud."

"Why," cried Harry, "I assumed that name at your suggestion."

"*My* suggestion!" exclaimed Mr. Wigriff; "how dare you make such a statement? It was only yesterday that I heard you had no right to the name of Wade, and I made a note of your real name in order to question you on the subject at the first convenient opportunity. But now I have lighted on this dreadful occurrence, and all is too plain."

Mr. Wigriff shook his head again, as he searched for his pocket-book, and Harry requested permission to explain.

"Certainly," said the great man. "Explanations I can allow,—nay, am anxious for; it is denials I cannot tolerate."

Harry accordingly explained by repeating Mr. Guffey's account of the conversation at Amphigorian Villa, but Mr. Wigriff, having listened with an expression of blank astonishment, scouted the idea that anything even resembling the alleged conversation had ever taken place, and added in his aggrieved tone, "I am afraid, young man, you're deceiving me. Mr. Guffey

could never have reported to you a conversation which never took place. I am afraid the name of Wilter, Welder, or whatever is your real name, is not altogether clean, young man. Oh," continued the great man, with a portentous shake of the head, "you are a misguided young man to think of laying such a foundation as this for the career you have announced for yourself."

"O God!" cried Harry, in despair. "In what a net am I entangled!"

"Ay, young man, in the unerring net of retribution. Crime, young man, is the seed of retribution. But unless you make it impossible for me to withhold my hand, *I* will not force you to reap what you have sown."

Harry sighed deeply; he almost wept. The facts seemed so strong against him that he began to trace Mr. Wigriff's conduct to an honest belief in his guilt, and it was with some emotion that he said, "I assure you, sir, that you are labouring under some great mistake, —an awful mistake as far as I am concerned; and I feel convinced that in a few days some-

thing will happen to disabuse your mind of this unfortunate misapprehension."

Mr. Wigriff waved this supposition away with a lofty air, and said, "I repeat that I shall not bandy words upon this most serious matter,—serious as regards your moral status. A forgery has been committed and a theft has been perpetrated, but such is my interest in you that, although I believe you to be the guilty person,—and who would not?" threw out Mr. Wigriff, addressing the world at large: "A young man with an *alias*, the sole receiver of money, and the book in which the forgery is committed never out of his possession. Such is my interest in you, I repeat, that I am most anxious you should have one more chance. With that end in view,—I trust not an improper one,—and in order also to punish myself for my too great confidence and neglect of ordinary precaution, I shall be content to bear the loss myself and keep the whole affair locked within my breast. But remember, young man, I shall retain this book, and if anything reprehensible arise in your future

conduct elsewhere,—for you cannot remain here,—I shall hold to myself the liberty of pursuing you to the bar of a criminal court to answer this charge."

With this, Mr. Wigriff locked the book up in a private drawer, and motioned Harry to be gone. Harry, however, proceeded to say, with considerable control, "You are mistaken, sir, terribly mistaken; but I admit, upon reflection, that, shocking to me as your charge was at first, the circumstances appear to be against me."

Mr. Wigriff was about to interpose, but Harry stopped him and went on, "Believing you are fully persuaded I have committed this crime, I can forgive you the slander as between ourselves, but, sir, I cannot leave this office on the terms you propose, because to do so, would be tacitly to admit the allegation. If you choose to charge me publicly, I will meet the charge publicly; still, if you prefer to let the matter rest here, in this room, I shall be likewise agreeable. But I cannot think of resigning my position here willingly. If you have

no further confidence in me, and insist on my leaving, I shall require the ordinary notice or the ordinary pecuniary equivalent. Otherwise I should feel I was leaving this office under circumstances little better than those which would be occupied by a convicted thief."

Mr. Wigriff announced, with much melodramatic action, that he was astonished, and he had every appearance of being so. He, moreover, disclaimed possessing the power to act upon Harry's suggestion; and when Harry said he was content to continue in the office until such time as Mr. Wigriff had the power, the man of commerce drew himself up, and made the following demonstration of good feeling, high principle, and magnanimity: "Young man," said he, "I am loth to be the instrument to put a period to your aspirations, and destroy your future utterly, but you drive me very hard young man, very hard. I said to myself last night when I heard of the deception you had practised upon me respecting your name, I said to myself, 'I will not go to the Benchers of his Inn of Court and say, "Here

is a young man who has been employed as a clerk at a certain stipend per anniu-um, occupying that menial position under an assumed name, which is evidence in itself—"' "

"You know, sir—" said Harry hastily.

"Pardon me," retorted Mr. Wigriff, waving him down; "allow me to conclude. Allow me. 'Under an assumed name,' I repeat, 'which is evidence in itself, if not of dishonest intentions, certainly of intentions not altogether honest.' And I say now," continued Mr. Wigriff, raising his voice, "I will not go willingly to the Benchers of the Hon. Society of the Inner Temple, and say that the young man who occupied that menial position under me by the name of Wade, is identically the same as the young man who has entered as a student in their hon. society by the name of Willwend, and that whether Wade or Willwend, I can prove him guilty of forgery and fraud. None of these things will I do willingly, young man, but I will refrain from doing them only on one condition, namely, that you leave this place instantly."

To this Harry replied that he had already given ample reasons for declining to resign, so Mr. Wigriff finding that he persisted in his determination, walked the room in silence for a time, and then deliberately wrote a cheque for £100, and sent a clerk to cash it.

"I am afraid I am doing wrong," said he, "but perhaps you are right in saying you cannot have a fair chance unless you leave this office to all appearances with clean hands."

"Excuse me, sir, I said nothing of the kind."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Wigriff, as if startled; "I understood you so."

"I said I could do nothing which would in any way tacitly admit the charge you now make."

"The same thing," said Mr. Wigriff, "precisely the same thing. Well, I give you that fair chance. Such is my interest in you, and my regret that you should have given way to this temptation, that I would give you an opportunity of redeeming your character in this office, but my duty to my fellow-directors and the shareholders forbids it."

Mr. Wigriff again relapsed into impressive silence, during which Harry thought much but held his peace. It cannot be said that his face testified to his innocence; indeed, Mr. Wigriff flattered himself that his adroit management had induced a rather hang-dog expression, quite sufficient to procure a conviction at the hands of any reasonable jury, and when he handed the misguided youth ten crisp bank-notes, with an earnest recommendation to enter upon a new course of life in a foreign land, he positively glowed with the feeling that he had done a thoroughly meritorious deed in letting Harry off so easily.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PERPLEXITY.

ALTHOUGH Harry Willwend left the office of the Planetary Evolution Locomotive Company under circumstances, assuming Mr. Wigriff's secrecy, of the most honourable character, the incidents of the day made him intensely wretched, and prompted him seriously to consider Mr. Wigriff's parting advice that he should emigrate. Even while he reassured himself that he was innocent, as he continually did, he was harassed with an almost intolerable feeling that he had done something very shameful, and this feeling was made still more unbearable by the fear that those before whom of all others he desired to keep his name reputable would soon be told that he was a forger and a thief. And these fears would not be gainsaid;

they weighed upon him as an ever-present consciousness. That he was really innocent counted for next to nothing against the fact that he had left a man strongly impressed, as he believed, with his guilt, so that a clear conscience served him but little; indeed, so great was his apprehension, that when he first entered the street, he dared scarcely lift his eyes to the faces of the passers-by, from some vague fear that they were acquainted with what had befallen him. But in a little time he overcame his nervousness, and set himself calmly to consider what grounds he had for present care or future apprehension. No sooner, however, had he commenced a review of his altercation with Mr. Wigriff, for he thought, perhaps this instinctive self-chiding arose from some error on his part in meeting the charge, than he was seized with violent regrets that he had not taken Wigriff by the collar and broken his head in retaliation; but on maturer reflection he concluded that this would have complicated matters, as it unquestionably would. Then he questioned whether he was not wrong

in having left the office before the matter was cleared up; but on consideration, he could not blame himself, because he had no power to make the directors retain him, if they chose to pay him for going, and perhaps it was better they, as a body, should not be made acquainted with Wigriff's suspicions. The only question remaining was as to whether he should sue Wigriff for defamation of character. This he concluded would be a very proper thing to do, if he were sure of success; but in the first place he had no witness to prove that Wigriff had defamed his character; and presuming the defamation proved, the charge of forgery would simply become a question of who should be believed,—he who declared his signature was forged, or the only person whose interest it was to forge it, and who had every facility for doing so. Besides all this, an action-at-law would bring out the ugly fact of the *alias*, which, as Mr. Wigriff had very justly observed, was certainly evidence of intentions not altogether honest, and which, if made public, would have put a stop to all Harry's legal pre-

tensions. It was true, that if Mr. Guffey had been an ordinary person, he could have explained that matter with sufficient clearness to satisfy everybody, except, perhaps, the Hon. Society of the Inner Temple, but as Mr. Guffey was not an ordinary person, Harry could not trust him to stand by his original account; and anybody who knows Mr. Guffey will easily understand Harry's misgivings.

So having carefully considered all these points, Harry resolved to pocket the insult with the £100, and keep the whole occurrence a profound secret from every one, not even excepting Julian Leep, so that he might the better test whether Wigriff would abide by his promise to keep the whole affair "locked within his breast." Harry naturally doubted his intentions in this respect, and his doubts urged him to lose no time in seeing Mrs. Roylstone before the slander reached her ears. It would of course be necessary to see Mrs. Roylstone in her husband's absence; and as Harry knew the great inventor had promised to be present at a meeting of the directors of the Planetary

Evolution Locomotive Company, on the following morning at twelve o'clock, he decided to time his visit accordingly. The lively hope which this decision gave birth to made him easier in his mind, and enabled him to bear himself before the world with more self-possession, but he was, notwithstanding, unable to get rid of the feeling that he had done something extremely wrong. Throughout the day and during all the night his thoughts strayed imperceptibly but most persistently to this one subject; for the hundredth time he criticized his conduct, and counselled himself for the future; for the hundredth time he blamed himself, and for the hundredth time failed to discover why he did so. If he had been guilty of all that Mr. Wigriff charged him with, he could not have been more disturbed, and would certainly have fretted less; strange as it may appear, his innocence was the chief cause of all his embarrassment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. HUBBLE HAS A FOX IN FULL VIEW.

On the morning after Colonel Willwend's death Mrs. Pavey opened the door to a portly gentleman advanced in years, who inquired whether Miss Willwend was at home. Said he, "My name's Hubble; I come from Mistress Brandlebraine, and in her behalf."

"Dear now," exclaimed Mrs. Pavey, "and isn't she well; beggin' your pardon, sir, which I've known her many and many a year?"

"No, ma'am, she's very unwell, I'm sorry to say, very unwell."

"Ah now, and that's the reason she hasn't a been here to see my young missis, which, sir, if I might make so bold, I should say she do very much want a little advice, with a corpse in the house and all the rest."

"What? eh? a corpse, my good woman; you don't mean to say—?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I do;" said Mrs. Pavey, fetching up the corner of her apron; "he died yesterday morning very early, sir."

Mr. Hubble was shocked to hear of the Colonel's death, and Mrs. Pavey said she was surprised to think he did not know of it, though how he was to know she really could not say, when she considered he had never been told. So, while Mrs. Pavey sought Mabel, Mr. Hubble moralized in the gloomy dining-room, upon the volubility of women, and pronounced it an inscrutable mystery. He, however, congratulated himself on having acted upon his professional rule, never to stop a person's tongue. "Conversation," said Mr. Hubble, "so often leads to business; and in this particular instance it's saved me from giving pain to a most excellent young lady, whom I shall now be able to meet fully informed." With this Mr. Hubble settled his spectacles, coughed behind his hand, and kept an expectant eye upon the doorway, for he

heard a light step upon the stairs. He was not deceived; in another minute he was bowing Mabel to a seat, and assuring her with a profusion of compliments, all of them at the same time of a most deferential character, that he was proud to be the bearer of a message to one in all respects so worthy of the friendship of Mistress Brandlebraine.

"Mistress Brandlebraine," he continued, "was not aware of what has befallen you, or no doubt her sympathy with you would have been heightened, and her commands to me would have been extended. I have simply come, as you will see by this brief note, to express to you her regret that protracted illness has prevented her coming to see you, and to place my services at your disposal in her behalf, should you in any way require them."

Mabel mingled her thanks with inquiries respecting Margaret, and found she was suffering from a kind of low fever; and Mr. Hubble shook his head sadly as he told of her proneness to give way to unavailing passion, her restlessness, her ravings, which had happily

ceased, and a weirdness in her look at times, "All of which," said he, "makes me fear for her mind. She has had much to bear in her lifetime has your friend, Miss Willwend. Much to bear."

"I knew she was not happy," said Mabel; and then looking into the old gentleman's face, she asked, "Pray, sir, have all people such troubles as she has?"

The old man smiled as he answered, "Well, no; but all have trouble of some sort. Most of us make our own, and most of us can mend our own; but it's the duty of all of us to bear one another's burdens, and as your friend thinks yours is lighter than her own, she has sent me to you."

"She's very, very kind," said Mabel; "and I was wishing very much she had been here yesterday."

"Eh, well," said Mr. Hubble; "let's hear what it was, and perhaps we may not be too late now."

So Mabel told of the battle she had had with Mr. Wigriff, and when she had ended she

looked at Mr. Hubble as if she expected him to say something. The old gentleman coughed and asked, "May I be so bold as to presume that you doubt Mr. Wigriff in some way?"

"Most certainly I do."

"Then you acted quite right; and Mr. Levant advised you well."

At this point Levant himself came in, and Mr. Hubble thought he noticed a little confusion and some blushing on Mabel's part as she introduced him; at any rate he resolved to make matters comfortable, and immediately became very demonstrative in his compliments respecting Levant's dexterity in postponing Wigriff's examination of the papers. It was but natural that Levant, in pursuance of his plan, should recommend Mabel to make Mr. Hubble her solicitor, for he felt perfectly safe in taking that step, considering in what capacity Mr. Hubble had introduced himself. On this, Mr. Hubble, with the greatest gallantry observed, that if Miss Willwend would be pleased to command him he was at her service; he promised to do his best, and would even

strive to compete with Mr. Levant in tendering sound advice.

Mabel, of course, said she was deeply grateful to him, whereupon he observed, "Then I understand you that you would wish me to be your solicitor?"

Mabel was afraid she did not quite understand.

"Well, would you like me to go to Mr. Wigriff and say, 'Now Miss Willwend has placed her affairs in my hands, so anything you wish to say to her you must say to me; and when you've said it, I shall go to her and advise her what to say to you in reply, and if she likes my answer I shall give it to you.' If I were to go to Mr. Wigriff and say that he would be bound to communicate with me, and me only, and you would never be troubled by him at all. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes; I should be very glad if you would do that."

"Very good," said the solicitor; "then we must act in form; there's a deal of form in the law, a great deal too much form in the law; if

there wasn't there'd be fewer lawyers and more honest people in the world. Now, in the first place, Miss Willwend, I must ask you to write a note to Mr. Wigriff; only a few lines just to hand him over to me, you know."

"Will you tell me what I am to say?" asked Mabel.

"Oh, to be sure; I'll give you the precise words as you write them."

Mabel thought this would make her task very easy, so she asked Mr. Hubble and Levant to her own room where she could write with more comfort, and in the course of half an hour she produced a fair copy in superior small text of the following note:—

"Sir,—I have placed my affairs in the hands of Mr. Hubble, of Bedford Row, who will in future represent me in all my dealings with you, and to whom I request you will communicate respecting the affairs of my late grandfather.

"Yours, etc.

"MABEL WILLWEND."

But when she had read it over, Mabel said,

with some trepidation, "I'm afraid Mr. Wigriff will be very angry with me for doing this."

"No doubt he will; but what of that?"

"He may come here," said Mabel, "and frighten me by some means, as he frightened me the other day."

"Then don't see him; don't let him in."

"But he walks in, sir; he has a latch-key."

"Then slip the bolt, and don't open the door until you're quite sure it isn't Mr. Wigriff, and if it is Mr. Wigriff refer him to me through the window, I'll settle him. The idea of a man going about bullying young ladies simply because they don't know Blackstone by heart, and haven't heard of The Bill of Rights. And you say he has a latch-key?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the first thing I'll do will be to require that latch-key to be delivered up. Monstrous notion, Mr. Levant, isn't it? What business has he with a latch-key?"

"Indeed I must say I always thought it very peculiar," said Levant.

"Peculiar!" exclaimed the old gentleman.

"It's monstrous; how did he come by the key?"

Mabel explained that he had the lock put on, kept one key himself, and gave her the other.

"Then who paid for it?" asked Mr. Hubble.

"Oh, Mr. Wigriff did, sir; he paid for everything, and gave me what money I required for housekeeping."

"And what has been done with the balance of your income at the end of each year?"

This question was beyond Mabel's comprehension, and, of course, Levant had no information to give, but Mr. Hubble soon discovered that nothing was ever said about balances in her hearing, and he concluded that there was a great deal to be inquired into. On parting he said, "Now remember! Don't let Mr. Wigriff in. If he gives you the least trouble, I'll come here myself and keep house. And as for the papers, make your mind quite easy about them; they shall not be touched except in our presence. Good-bye, Miss Willwend; I shall take a good though melancholy ac-

count of you to Mistress Brandlebraine, and shall do myself the honour of calling here to-morrow to see whether I can be of any service to you."

With this and a very sincere farewell from Mabel, and an exchange of similar courtesies with Levant, the old gentleman walked down the Terrace in the highest possible spirits, for there was nothing he liked so much as running a fox to earth, and Wigriff seemed to promise rare sport indeed.

CHAPTER XXV.

HARRY IN SEARCH OF A FATHER.

HARRY WILLWEND found a neat little brougham outside the house of Mrs. Roylstone as he knocked at the door at a quarter to one, to pay his visit. It was an extremely neat little brougham; it did not look like a doctor's, it could hardly be a visitor's at that time of day, and he greatly feared it was waiting to take Mr. Roylstone to Blackfriars. The footman who opened the door had something on his mind, something amusing; he regarded Harry's card absently, and repeated his inquiry as to whether Mrs. Roylstone was engaged, with mechanical exactness, as if to wean his mind from the amusing subject on which it dwelt. Having reduced himself to the level of his situation, he answered, "Yes, sir, Mrs. Royl-

stone air engaged, sir, and I expect she'll be some time engaged; but if you'll walk in here, sir, I'll take your card up."

Harry obeyed by entering a large and dreary chamber looking on the street, where he amused himself by imagining who could be the owner of the brougham, and what could have brought him or her to Mrs. Roylstone's on a long visit. As he pondered, admiring the immobility of the coachman, the footman appeared on the pavement, and through a partly open window Harry heard him tell the coachman that his mistress desired him to go home.

"Getting on, eh?" said the coachman, with a slight jerk of his whip, to the first floor.

"Rather," said the footman; "it's all settled."

"No," said the coachman incredulously.

"Oh, yes, sutten."

"Look 'ere," continued the coachman; "jest 'edge up my bearing-rein while yer tell us."

"Oh, there ain't no call for that, they're all in the back. And there ain't much to tell;

it's jest all settled, and the missis is going to let the old man know of it, which she don't think he'll have any objection. There'll be a flare-up, John, afore you're a month older."

"Sudden," said the coachman.

"Uncommon sudden, considerin'."

"*Con*siderin'," repeated the coachman, who proceeded to observe solemnly, "Now, I've only lost five bob on it with our cook, but I'm blest if I thought she'd 'a done it; upon my soul I didn't."

"Lord bless yer, why, she'd 'a done anything to 'ook 'im."

"What, with the other'n still a-runnin' about town?"

"Why not? that's jest what gives the relish to it, that is; that's jest what's made her all the more anxious to 'ook 'im. Why, a female wouldn't give a thankee for 'ookin' of a gent, if she didn't put another female's nose out of joint by the move."

"P'raps so," remarked the coachman.

"You should 'a seen her jest now, when I took that gent's card up," added the foot-

man; "she was lookin' jest as if she knowd she'd won, and the two old gals was as affable as if they was going to be married theirselves."

About five minutes after this conversation had ended, Harry was delighted with a summons to walk upstairs; but on entering Mrs. Roylstone's morning room, he was received not only by Mrs. Roylstone, but by Brian, as well, and next Brian sat Miss Admarine Carter-Striver, and next her her rubicund mamma. Mrs. Roylstone, luxuriating in a *fauteuil*, and with her head thrown back, looked at Harry, and through him as well, and took in a range of some forty miles beyond. Admarine, with drooping eyelids, and her head also thrown back, indolently examined the carpet. Mrs. Carter-Striver folded her arms as rank and fashion loves to fold its arms, and regarded the young man who wished to see Mrs. Roylstone with supercilious interest. None of them seemed to know him, and nobody rose as he entered. But for all that he bowed profoundly, and Brian, by way of acknowledg-

ment, motioned him to a seat. Harry accordingly sat down with his face to the light; and as the quartette were ranged in a semi-circle before him, he felt as if he were in a dock, and that society was trying him, for he had not a doubt but that the select party were in full possession of Mr. Wigriff's suspicions. The proceedings were opened by Brian, who sat sideways on his chair, with one arm hanging over its back. Speaking with affected indolence and unconcern, he said, "Mrs. Royl-stone presumed your business with her could occupy but a very short time, so I prevailed on her friends whom she was entertaining, to excuse her if she gave you audience."

Mrs. Carter-Striver coughed a most polite little cough during the silence which followed this observation, and it said, as plainly as any cough could speak, "Yes, young man, we've all agreed to see how uncomfortable we can make you." They were succeeding admirably in their object, for Harry was unable to utter a word. He could not ask to see Mrs. Royl-stone alone, and he could not, for the life of

him, concoct a fictitious pretext for his visit. But society still waited for him, and he stammered out something about Mrs. Roylstone's consideration, and hinted that she probably guessed the object of his visit. On this Brian said, with the same affectation of unconcern:

"Mrs. Roylstone presumes you have come to inquire whether she knows anything of your deceased parents, on the assumption that your name is Willwend, and not Wade."

That was a home-thrust, and Mrs. Carter-Striver looked on her future son-in-law with pride.

Harry assented, and explained that he had taken the name of Wade at Mr. Wigriff's suggestion, for reasons it was not necessary to particularize. He further explained that his parents had died, to the best of his belief, when he was away at a boarding-school, and he was not aware that he had any relations living. Mrs. Roylstone's apparent knowledge of Colonel Willwend had awakened hopes within him, which he earnestly trusted could be justified, and he had called to see what information she could afford him.

"In a matter of this nature, it will be necessary to proceed by stages," said Brian; "to clear the way, you know."

Harry bowed assent, so Brian continued, "That being agreed on, I should like to ask you one or two questions respecting your early recollections, so that you may answer them without reference to what Mrs. Roylstone may know of Colonel Willwend."

Harry saw the force of this plan; and although he heartily wished it had been carried out in private, he was unable to do anything else than assent, and he accordingly bowed again as the three ladies' heads went further back, and the three ladies smiled at one another, or glanced approvingly on society's spokesman.

"It will be necessary first, then," said Brian, "to identify *you*."

Harry bowed and blushed and blushed again, as Brian asked, "Have you any recollection of Aberglidd?"

But though he blushed his hopes rose high, for he thought this question came by way of Mrs. Roylstone.

"Yes; I was there when I was about eleven years old," he said.

"Under what circumstances?"

"I have a very indistinct remembrance—of the—the circumstances of my coming—to be there."

"With whom did you live?" asked Brian.

"A man named Jenkins," said Harry, and society exchanged glances, gleeful glances; so Harry was convicted, and it only remained for Brian to pass sentence, which he did by saying:

"It's quite clear, then, we have been correctly informed that you are this Jenkins's apprentice; and that being so, it is quite impossible you can be connected in any way with the Colonel Willwend whom Mrs. Roylstone knew in her youth. D'yer see?"

Brian still indolently lounged in his chair, but his face now wore an insolent smile of triumph, and society generally regarded the pretender with supercilious contempt.

Harry saw now there was nothing before him but abject humiliation or honourable re-

treat; honourable at least in his own estimation. He chose the latter, and forgetting the intensity of his disappointment in his anger, he answered with dignity:

"I came to hear what information Mrs. Roylstone could give me."

"And you have heard," said Mrs. Roylstone, with corresponding dignity; "you have heard I have been mistaken in you."

"No, madam," said Harry, rising; "I have heard the early incident of my life distorted to humble me in the eyes of this company. Pardon me, if I say I should have had more hope of justice if the life of my traducer had been pure, and if his hearers were not ready to condone his offences."

The tribunal, with the exception of the rubicund matron, became severe of countenance at this, but discreetly held its peace; and Harry, bowing with much reverence, left the room.

But in the open street, with no foe before him to kindle his anger, and no task to tax his energies, he was more inclined to weep over the wreck of his hopes than to rejoice

in his poor triumph. It was sweet to pierce them through their golden mail, and make them wince again; but who could say their armour had been pierced, and who had seen them wince; and what was his one voice against a world of sycophants, some of them in lawn, for he knew there never was such armour as wealth, since it was almost proof against the devil himself, and always hid deformity?

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOST PROFOUND PHILOSOPHY.

HARRY broke down in his resolution to conceal his rupture with Wigriff from Julian Leep. Silence on the subject before his good old friend was irksome, even when he had a prospect of setting off the dicovery of a father against the loss of a situation, and perhaps of a character; but when this hope was gone, he felt he could no longer restrain himself, and impelled by the desire to lay the whole matter before Julian, he was at no loss to find numerous good reasons, not only to justify this confidence, but to prove that a full and clear statement of his position was absolutely necessary. So upon the evening of the day when Mrs. Roylstone did her duty by society, Harry waited in the little room for Julian Leep, until

night had well closed in; and when the old man came he told his story from beginning to end. Then putting the hundred pounds upon the table, he said, "Now the sum and substance of the whole matter, and the resolutions I have come to, are these: my chances of being called to the bar are almost *nil*, with all these people against me, so I mean to give it up at once; go on quietly with the book business, and compensate you as soon as I can, for all the expense you have been put to through my foolish ventures. There's the first instalment;" he added, pushing the notes to the old man, who answered glibly, "And I'll not take it. Why should you make your future miserable by anticipation? Haven't you had disappointments sufficient that you must court more?"

"But these people," said Harry, with a tremulous voice, "seem to pursue me with the distinct intention of doing me harm; they seem to find out such peculiarly refined ways of injuring me. I sometimes think they must have some reason for doing me ill, beyond what we know of."

"No, no," said Julian, "the reasons we know of are enough. Wigriff's belief in your guilt is enough for the one, and Roylstone's desire to humble you in the estimation of a certain lady is enough for the other. You're weak in worldly strength, and they spurn you without a thought; such merry gentlemen do justice only to their equals, and are merciful only to those above them."

"Then if I am so weak," said Harry, "and they're so strong and heartless, why should I give them the pleasure of beating me down? What if I were to go on as you wish, and at the time when I should be called, one of those who have pursued me hitherto should face me then, distort the incidents of my life, and persuade the benchers I was unworthy of the honour sought?"

"Why you'd get the better of them, as you always have."

"How have I got the better of my traducers this time?" asked Harry.

"In this way, my most desponding youth: three days ago you were clerk in a company's

office, and a guest of one of its directors, were earning your money in the one place, and were worth your entertainment in the other. Now you have lost your situation, but you are nearly a hundred pounds the richer thereby; you will have no more invitations from Mrs. Carter-Striver, but you know whom to avoid."

Harry had no answer for this; so Julian went on: "You are desponding, not because you have lost anything, but because you haven't gained something you hoped for. You had tumbled into the position of a gentleman without a gentleman's means to sustain you. Your prosperity has not yet evened your ambition, my boy, and your strength has fallen short of your prosperity. Let your ambition mount as high as the clouds, but don't let it tempt you beyond your strength."

"What do you mean by my strength?"

"Your social position; the number, standing, and sincerity of your friends. Why, my impetuous youth, your temporary prosperity has blinded you; you have been speculating without capital, and with the first hitch you are in *The Gazette*."

"Then we should hope our orange-tree will blossom for a brighter and more worthy brow. Perhaps theirs will never blossom; perhaps it will wither in the bud."

"I hope it may rot at the root," said Harry hoarsely. "To think of that man having money to squander, when a tithe of his waste would save me years of work, and keep me from taxing your good nature. Yet he robs me of time and energy, by making my way laborious. It's such as he who should devote themselves to work, which we, who have to earn our daily bread, must starve to touch. Our brains, our only capital, cannot be used for any but immediate profit. We cannot undertake a labour of a year or two in the hope of doing good to our fellows, looking for no other profit than that good. Why are such men born with wealth to waste? Feeling, as I do now, I believe with such a fulcrum, I'd choose my place and *go* to it."

This was the old man's entertainment; he loved to hear his boy go on in this wild way; not that he agreed with him, but he used to

say to himself, "It's healthy; he chews the cud well, does my boy, and with better feed he'll give better milk." So at this time, Julian put his hands under the tails of his coat, and having taken a leisurely survey of Harry, flattered himself the world owed him thanks for having preserved, if not a genius, at least a highly creditable specimen of humanity. But, for all that, he could not permit him to promulgate false philosophy, especially in contradiction of himself; so he said, "But you forget, my youthful leveller. What was it you wrote yourself, some three years ago, eh? Listen," said Julian, fetching a book from a shelf, "while we teach you out of your own mouth:—

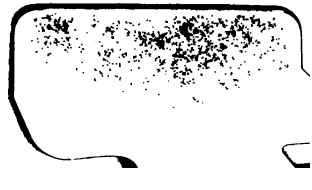
Suppose that by an accident of birth,
Your places had been changed. Think you that then
Your wealthy schooling would have kept you free
From all the vices that beset his youth?
Would you have gained the virtues that you have,
Begotten of adversity and want?
Would you have learned to feel for others' woes;
And, generous to a fault, would you stand by
Helping a poorer rival so to gain
What you as well desire and could obtain?

Rather would gold held by your young hand
Give it a palsy, cheat it of cunning,

And with jaundiced properties impregnate
Your brain, close up its several entrances;
And so depriving you of all life's health,
Leave you an empty effigy of a man;
Too poor to know your needs, too weak to gain
A nobler fortune or a bigger brain.

There, you bundle of inconsistency," said the old man. "Sleep upon that, and don't go crying to the gods for a palsy in your right hand. And wake up with this very pertinent passage, from the same distinguished and most profound moral philosopher:—

"Let the excellence of your work be your prologue and advertisement; ask for no favour, but make it the self-interest of every one whose help's worth having to push you on!"

END OF VOL. II.

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